This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

3 3433 07494260 2

THE CAPTAIN of THE AMARYLLIS

STOUGHTON COOLEY

Digitized by Google

LC

Digitized by Google

Mrs C Brandt
Comp. of The Author.

Cooley

NCW

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

He re-read the few words on the paper a number of times.

Digitized by Google

THE CAPTAIN
OF THE
AMARYLLIS

By
STOUGHTON COOLEY

THE C. M. CLARK PUBLISHING COMPANY
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

E.S.

Digitized by Google

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
260688A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1926 L

COPYRIGHT, 1910
BY
THE C. M. CLARK PUBLISHING COMPANY
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
U. S. A.

All Rights Reserved

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

Chapter		*Page*
I	Out of debt, but—	1
II	Miss Sally comes aboard	6
III	The three rivals	31
IV	The old Colonel and his niece	46
V	The fate of the blasphemer	57
VI	The Captain's fight for liberty	95
VII	What happened when Miss Sally went to New Orleans	125
VIII	The plot and the soft-boiled eggs	144
IX	Ingram pleads for Sidney	162
X	Miss Sally sends the Captain a poem	182
XI	The Mardi Gras trip of the Amaryllis	203
XII	The Captain makes an unexpected rescue	219
XIII	An unconventional kindness	244
XIV	Mrs. Semperfield in a dilemma	257
XV	The run in the fog	274
XVI	The disaster that befell the Hercules	296
XVII	David's mother worries	318
XVIII	Ingram mystifies his friends	328
XIX	How Sidney distinguishes himself at the hog-drive	343
XX	The old engineer discourses on women	359
XXI	The roustabouts' diversion	373
XXII	How Henri Mollison wiped out an old score	382
XXIII	What came of the compact between Sidney and the Captain	402

26X269

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ILLUSTRATIONS

He re-read the few words on the paper a number of times . . . . . Frontispiece

Page

"Oh, Uncle, it's so good to be at home again with you" 47

"Come, woman," he commanded, "this is foolishness. Sit down and be reasonable" 137

"But it hasn't been such a hard world for us after all. Has it, partner?" . . 186

"It did me a world of good to see Sidney put his hand to the plow" 301

The Amaryllis snorted and puffed as she tugged her best 310

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE CAPTAIN OF THE AMARYLLIS

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF DEBT, BUT—

A TALL, broad-shouldered man of perhaps thirty-five stood by the forward rail on the boiler deck of the Amaryllis gazing meditatively at a slip of paper in his hand. His smile evidently denoted satisfaction, for he re-read the few words on the paper a number of times, and even turned it over to scan the penned figures and memoranda on the back. There must have been something stimulating in the words to cause him to square his shoulders and throw back his head with a commanding air. Presently he was joined by an older man who had just come out of the cabin carrying a newspaper folded in such a way as to display a marked paragraph near the center of the first column of the page.

"Seen this, Captain?" he inquired, laconically.

"No," the other responded, turning to him, and holding out the slip of paper he had been reading: "but I've seen this; which is of more interest

Digitized by Google

to me than anything in the *Picayune* this morning."

"Perhaps," the older man assented with a peculiar tone; but after reading the few lines of print and pen he exclaimed with spirit: "The last note cancelled, good! Congratulations!" He turned the note over and read the figures on the back. "Whew! Some interest paid on that, Captain."

"Well, thank the Lord it's stopped at last."

"Amen. Nothing like interest to eat a man up."

"You're right, Disbrow. It takes a mighty good steamboat to pay for herself and the interest."

"And a mighty good man to run her," the other echoed.

The younger man smiled his acknowledgment of the compliment, and again threw back his shoulders to take in a deep breath. His rugged features were radiant. So self-satisfied was he that he did not note the unresponsive face of the older man, but exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"Ah, Disbrow, there's nothing like liberty to set a man up, and make him glad he's living; and he never appreciates it more than when he has labored for years to pay off a debt. Don't owe a dollar—and the Amaryllis with a good season before her. Now I'll lay by something for a rainy day. But what," he said, checking himself, and reaching out his hand for the paper with the

Digitized by Google

marked paragraph, "have you found among the Jackstaffs that is so interesting?"

The pleased smile faded from his face as he ran his eye quickly over the marked lines. He read them again, with more deliberation, and then lifted his eyes to an old three-story building across the levee, bearing conspicuously above the cornice in large gilt letters the name "H. Mollison," and on the wall between the first and second story windows, in the same large gilt letters, "Boat Store."

The older man saw the look of disappointment that swept over the strong features, but he noted also the determined set of the jaw, and the tightening of the muscles, as though to withstand a shock.

"But the dispatch doesn't say," he ventured, after a silence, "that the Whistler is going to Monroe."

"No," the other responded in a hard, deliberate tone in striking contrast with that of his previous mood, "it doesn't say it. When your enemy starts after you with a pistol he doesn't have to say anything."

The two men gazed in silence at the large lettered sign on the boatstore, unmindful of the busy scene on the wharf, where drays were dumping consignments of freight to go up the river, and of the stir and bustle on the forecastle immediately below them. Presently a smile came over the face of the younger man, a quiet smile

Digitized by Google

of resignation, and the muscles of his jaw relaxed.

"Well, Disbrow," he said, "if the Whistler does go into the Ouachita River, it will be a fight to a finish."

"But is it really necessary, Captain? Can't you — "

"Compromise? No, sir. I'll never haul down my flag to old Henri Mollison — not if I had ten steamboats to lose."

"But he has millions where you have thousands. It's suicide to try to run against him. I like your spirit, Captain, but — but it does seem too bad to have it come just as you get onto your feet. To think how you've struggled all these years to get out of debt, only to run into this. Well, I still hope he won't get after you."

The old man walked back into the cabin and entered the office, where, perched on a high stool, he set to work on his books. The Captain remained standing by the forward rail, buried in thought. Presently he drew from the inside pocket of his coat an envelope bearing a special delivery stamp. It had already been opened, but he drew out the enclosed letter — taking care that the spray of violets should drop back into the envelope as he did so — and read it again. It was written in a feminine hand, quite scrawly and hard to read, but he managed to make out: "Dear Captain:—If your old boat doesn't sink or blow up before she reaches here, and you think she

Digitized by Google

will get to Daphne before Christmas, I wish you would stop for me on your way up." There was more in the same bantering vein, with facetious messages to members of the crew, and at the bottom of the page the signature, intelligible only to those who knew beforehand what it was,—"Sally Heath."

"Aha," he said to himself as he folded the letter and slipped it into the envelope, taking care not to disturb the violets, "that explains why my dear friend Basel, son of my dear friend Henri, goes up with us this trip. I see, I see. His aunt at the Convent has written him of Miss Sally's unexpected return home, and he is to be on hand to take advantage of the opportunity when she comes aboard. Ah, Sidney, you'll have to watch the son as close as I do the father."

Digitized by Google

Chapter II.

MISS SALLY COMES ABOARD

The Amaryllis was the regular Ouachita weekly packet, plying between New Orleans and Monroe, and known in the trade as the "Wednesday boat," from the fact that she left the city midway of the week. She was a stern-wheel boat with a capacity of forty-five hundred bales of cotton, and from one hundred to two hundred passengers, according to the degree of crowding. Being in the cotton trade she seldom made any landings during the first hundred and thirty miles out from New Orleans, or until she reached Baton Rouge. The intervening territory, known as "the Coast," was served by "sugar boats," which ran only as high as the capital, or, at farthest, to Bayou Sara.

A regular stop was made at Baton Rouge if for no other reason than to pick up a coal flat, which was towed up the river while the roustabouts filled the bunkers with coal. A similar stop, and for the same reason, was made at Bayou Sara — for a warehouse keeper who also represents a coal company finds ready buyers among freight-seeking steamboats. From Bayou Sara to the mouth of Red River the landings were more frequent. These plantations divided their business between

Digitized by Google

the tributary boats — boats running up Ouachita and Red rivers — and the Mississippi boats running to Vicksburg. But the bulk of the Amaryllis' business was with the towns and plantations along the Black and the Ouachita rivers, which completed her five-hundred-mile run to Monroe.

There was one landing below Baton Rouge, however, that the Amaryllis had been making twice a year for some time past, that at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, the old Catholic School that had served boatmen as a land-mark almost from the beginning of steam navigation. Set in a beautiful park of live-oaks and semi-tropical plants, the great white building, with its quaint dormer windows, presented to passersby on the river a picture of peace, purity and restfulness.

Twice each season the Amaryllis stopped at the Convent, in the fall at the beginning of school, to put ashore a young lady, with much ado and formality; and again in the spring, at the end of the term, to take aboard the same young lady, with even more ado and formality.

So consequential had this landing become that the pilot who happened to be on watch showed his appreciation of the occasion by exercising the utmost care in finding the very best place for the stage. So, too, the mate; that energetic gentleman, who made himself so conspicuous by expressing his thoughts in a peculiar jargon often mistaken by landsmen for profanity — but which

Digitized by Google

in reality is merely a virile form of slang adapted to the understanding of mules and roustabouts —saw to it that there was a broad, clear gangway on the forecastle, lest the dainty skirts of the aforesaid young lady should by chance brush a molasses barrel, or other clothes-defiling piece of freight. And when the nose of the boat, so solicitously guided by the pilot, did finally touch the bank, the stage was lowered in the particular spot where it would be firm and level. And then, after the pilot and the mate had done their utmost, the boat being at rest, the stage in position, and all things in readiness, it was the inestimable privilege of the second clerk to escort the young lady ashore, where she was delivered into the arms of a sprightly little old Frenchwoman, who was always there to meet her, and where he received for the discharge of this particular bit of the boat's cargo a receipt in the shape of a smile that long lingered in his memory, and often haunted him as he checked cotton or counted staves on dreary nights at desolate plantation landings.

And then, as the Amaryllis backed reluctantly from the landing, amid the handkerchief-wavings of the young lady and the sprightly little old Frenchwoman, and the hat-liftings of the various officers, and not a few passengers, each and every one of whom seemed to take the farewell to himself, the forsaken admirers heaved a sigh, and began to look forward to the time when the next landing would be made at the Convent.

Digitized by Google

There were, to be sure, wavings of handkerchiefs in the meantime, whenever the boat passed the picturesque old school in daylight; but the distance was too great to permit of much enthusiasm, or even to allow assurance that the person ashore was really the one she was supposed to be — for the well-known disposition of the young lady to play jokes on her friends, tempted the more sceptical of her admirers to doubt her good faith. Not that she would fail to give the most enthusiastic greeting when opportunity offered, but if she were absent, or happened to be under the surveillance of an exacting Sister, it would not be at all unlike her to depute a servant to acknowledge the greetings from the passing steamer.

All these considerations, and many others that might be named for the over-sceptical, will account in some degree for the look of eager expectancy on the faces of the officers of the boat when she landed at the Convent on her up-trip just before Christmas. For, notwithstanding this break in the regularity of the long-established custom, there was not one among them who did not know that for some reason the young lady was going home to spend the holidays with her uncle at Daphne plantation. Not only were the officers of the Amaryllis aware of this, but Basel Mollison, son of Henri Mollison, the rich old boatstoreman of New Orleans, also was aware of it, and had purposely come down from his plan-

Digitized by Google

tation on Ouachita in order that he might have an opportunity of pressing his suit before she should get back to Sidney Drake.

And, as if to still further accentuate this innovation, the boat, which should have arrived at the Convent about midnight — for it was only sixty-two miles above New Orleans — had been delayed seven hours by fog, and was now rounding College Point in broad daylight. But, notwithstanding these happenings and expectations, it was all as report had had it. As the beautiful steamer, her snow-white cabin glistening in the rays of the sun just rising above the cypress swamp that fringed the back of the Coast plantations, proudly approached the landing, with such officers and passengers as were awake gathered on the boiler deck in response to the whistle, there was the young lady, standing beside the little old Frenchwoman on the green-carpeted levee, together with the usual assortment of trunks, boxes and bundles — for while the wardrobe admitted to the school was meager enough to satisfy rigorous requirements, the indulgent old aunt cared for the extras.

There was, however, one striking change in the long-established custom of receiving this precious bit of cargo. As the steamer approached the bank, the Captain was seen to descend to the main deck, where he took his stand at the end of the stage. To be sure, Joe Danforth, the second clerk, was there, as, also, was Basel Mollison. But

Digitized by Google

when the stage was lowered it was only natural that these two young gentlemen should step aside to allow the commanding officer to go first ashore; and this much having been yielded, it also was but natural that the two young gentlemen, when they found their services as escorts were unnecessary, should make a virtue of necessity, and accept with such grace as they could the smiles of the young lady as she swept down the stage on the arm of the Captain.

"What ails your old boat, Captain?"—the soft drawl of her voice, and the slurred r's were no less pleasing than the teasing flash of her dark eyes. "Seems to me she gets slower every trip; I reckon she'll soon be a ten-day boat."

"Now, Miss Sally," he responded in well pretended aggrievement. "And that is the gratitude we find after laying up seven hours in the fog, and getting here in daylight."

"La, Captain Ingram, you don't expect thanks for laying up in the fog — and keeping me up all night for fear you might come!"

"Not for laying up, of course, but for trying to run when the fog was so thick Lewison couldn't see over the apron of the pilot-house. He declared he would reach the Convent before two o'clock, and I had to put him in irons to keep him from sinking the boat."

"Goodness me, Captain,"—she tossed her head saucily at him—"you get worse and worse. Who you reckon 's going to believe such tales? Any-

Digitized by Google

way, the Fleety went up before day — now what can you say?"

"Oh, indeed, the Fleety," he exclaimed, scornfully. "If the Amaryllis had no more freight than the Fleety, she would have been here hours ago."

"Dear me," she cried in mock despair, "and my baggage coming aboard an overloaded boat — I just know we'll never get to Daphne."

By this time they had reached the stairs, and ascended to the boiler deck, where the young lady was immediately surrounded by her friends, among whom was Lewison, the pilot, who tried to forestall her badinage by telling how he had refused to lay up for the fog.

"You and Captain Ingram made up that yarn just to excuse your pokey old boat. Next thing you'll say he put you in irons."

"So he did, Miss Sally" — he cast a reproachful look at the sober-visaged Captain, but in whose eyes lurked merriment—"but I didn't intend you should know I'd worn a felon's bracelets."

"La, Mr. Lewison, the only bracelet you ever wore belonged to some lady you were flirting with."

This provoked a laugh from the bystanders, for Lewison was widely known as a lady's man, and the pilot-house was generally filled when he was on watch. After a few more bantering remarks, accompanied by much laughter, the new

Digitized by Google

passenger was escorted by the steward back to the ladies' cabin, where she received an effusive welcome from Molly, the chambermaid.

"It does my ol' eyes good to see you, honey," cried the good-natured negress. "It does so. Jes' de spit'n image of yo' po' mamma. How yo' all come on, chile, anyhow?"

While speaking she led her charge into a stateroom, whence bursts of laughter were soon heard, and scraps of conversation from which the r's had been pruned.

When the young lady reappeared in the cabin, with her hat off, and a great Mareschel Niel in her black hair, no stranger with an appreciative eye, to say nothing of a susceptible heart, could have wondered at the interest shown by the officers.

"Isn't she a peach?" the impulsive second clerk cried as he caught sight of her. "Look at those eyes, will you, and that hair. Did any one ever see such features? By Jove — "

"Oh, come," interrupted Bushnell, the pessimistic second mate, "you're too young to have opinions about woman's charms. Why, man, look at her large mouth, and the pug nose, and the freckles, and — "

Danforth made a pretended thrust at him with a caseknife, which caused old Mr. Disbrow, who sat at the head of the table, to exclaim reprovingly, "Children, children." And then turning with a twinkle in his eyes to Grady, the first mate,

Digitized by Google

who, though on watch, had sauntered into the cabin, and was standing by the office door listening to the conversation at the table, "How about that, Mike?"

"Don't ask me," the mate answered, "I'm no lady's man. I don't see anything the matter with the girl — except she's 'most too small."

"That's because you're a runt yourself," exclaimed the irreverent Danforth. "Little men like big women—have to have someone to look after them. Too small, indeed! Why, she's just right — you don't get girls by the pound, but by the — the — "

"There," Bushnell exclaimed sarcastically, "it's time you'd run down."

"I'll leave it to Lewison," Danforth retorted, nodding to the man across the table.

"If you'll take my word for it," the pilot answered, "I say Miss Sally is the prettiest girl in Louisiana."

"Why not the world?" Bushnell nagged.

"Same thing," Lewison snapped; he could not abide Bushnell's carping criticism.

"But didn't you," the unabashed pessimist urged, "say that young widow who got on at Bayou Sara, and spent so much of her time in the pilot-house was the handsomest woman in Louisiana!"

But Lewison received the taunt in silence, and the second clerk turned to his chief at the head of the table, "What do you say, Mr. Disbrow?"

Digitized by Google

"I?" the benign old gentleman echoed. "Oh, I think Miss Sally is charming — most charming." And he looked back at the young lady in question with a pleased expression on his kindly face.

"Well," said Danforth, turning to the man at the foot of the table, who had thus far taken no part in the conversation, "it's up to you, Socrates; what do you say?"

"Yes," Bushnell chimed in, "let's have wisdom from its source."

The man thus irreverently, though not unkindly, addressed was more than twice the age of either of the young men who had spoken, and the lines in his face, and the way he held his head, marked him as one who not only had seen much of the world, but who had opinions on life. So general and extensive, indeed, was his range of information, and so apt his opinions, that he was familiarly known among the crew as "Old Socrates"; and no subject under discussion was considered sufficiently thrashed out until he had passed upon it.

"Well, boys," Wedgwood responded, tilting his head a little to one side, as was his way when considering matters of weight, "laying aside individual tastes, I should say that Miss Sally has fine eyes, an indispensable requisite to beauty. They are large, clear, and full of fire. To be sure, some prefer blue eyes, but those who like the dark, limp — "

"Cut out the adjectives," Bushnell broke in.

Digitized by Google

"Use all the honey-words you want to," Danforth responded.

"As I was saying," the old engineer continued in even tones, taking no notice of either remark, "unless a person has a pronounced aversion to dark eyes, he certainly could find nothing finer than Miss Sally's. Some might consider her mouth a trifle large, though better that than too small; large mouths, like large ears, denote generosity — when they are not found on stingy people. Then, there is that little dimple at the corner of the mouth."

"Scar, you mean," interjected the second mate.

"A scar it might seem to a sceptic, or a pessimist, or a woman-hater, that trinity of unholiness," the old man went on in his even tone. "Possibly the eye of science might pronounce it a blemish; but the lover and the poet — and who else has a right to pass judgment on woman? — the lover and the poet, I say, call it a dimple."

"I have read that ladies have dimples cut in their cheeks." This from the unabashed Bushnell.

"It ill becomes a gentleman, sir," the philosopher replied with great severity, "to question the origin of woman's charms; it is all sufficient that she has them. Furthermore, young man, if you wish to experience the delights that come of the gratification of the sense of beauty, never use a microscope on a rose. If you must use a micro-

Digitized by Google

scope, apply it to cheese mould, or to the green scum of a frog pond."

"Now will you be good?" crowed Danforth.

"But to return to our subject," Wedgwood continued. "When Miss Sally smiles, which I am pleased to see is often, it begins in her eyes, then jumps down to the little dimple I have mentioned, runs around her sensitive mouth, and becomes audible as it bursts from between her parted lips in a peal of laughter like the — "

"Careful, careful — care — ful," Bushnell cautioned.

"Her complexion is fine, as all must admit. That rich olive tint denotes blood; in fact, a mingling of bloods, French and English, with a dash of Spanish, a superb blending. I can't agree with you, Dan, that her nose is a pug; doubtless you are troubled with strabismus. I should not even say it was retrousse; but rather that it is piquant, if I may be allowed to use the word. Nor can I agree with our friend Grady that she is too small. Small women, you will notice, have small feet, and keep them well shod. Besides, we should never think of quantity when considering woman's charms; indeed, I am not sure but that the law of scarcity comes in at this point to favor the small woman."

"I suppose that's why all old maids are large," Bushnell commented, sarcastically.

"Again I protest, Dan. Surely it is sufficient hardship to have one's charms unappreciated,

Digitized by Google

without being branded an 'old maid.' I much prefer to think of our unfortunate single sisters, as did Dr. Holmes. You know the genial poet said — "

But an apology is due the reader for allowing a young lady to stand in the middle of the cabin, the common focus of the eyes of all the passengers seated at the long row of tables, partaking of the first course of the morning meal, while the officers who were going on watch discussed her charms. Indeed, no sooner did she emerge from her stateroom than the steward hastened up to escort her to the table.

There was evidently a good trip of passengers, for all the places were occupied except two, one next to the Captain, who sat at the head of the first table, and the other at the second table, beside Basel Mollison — kept vacant by an obliging cabin-boy in consideration of a liberal tip. As the steward escorted the young lady down the cabin he was about to pass on to the second table when arrested by an inquiry from the Captain, and, catching a meaning look from his chief officer, he seated his charge there.

The first meal of the day came too early to find the passengers in a conversational mood, and observations had for the most part been confined to formal greetings, but no sooner had the young lady been seated beside the Captain than the two fell into a heated discussion as to the speed of the Amaryllis, her commanding officer

Digitized by Google

offering to back his boat to the extent of a pair of gloves and a hat — the hat not to cost over twenty-seven dollars — against the time of any boat running into the mouth of Red River; while the new passenger seemed uncertain whether to liken her speed to that of a tired snail or a lame mud-turtle. The dry remarks of the sober-faced Captain, and the infectious laughter of the girl, caused a distinct quickening of the spirits of the others at table.

All, that is, save young Mollison, who, apparently oblivious of the facetious remarks of his fellow passengers, finished his light breakfast in dignified silence. The young Frenchman, owing to his habit of going back and forth between New Orleans, or "The City," as it was familiarly called, and his plantation, was as well known to the officers of the boat, as to his neighbors about Sterling; and he was unpopular with both.

All of them questioned his taste in displaying his wealth, but aside from that, the fact that he was the son of Henri Mollison, the rich boat-storeman, was of itself sufficient to condemn him in the eyes of the crew — for it was the unwritten law on the river that no boatman should have anything but ill will toward the keeper of a boat-store.

Yet neither Basel's neighbors nor the crew dared show their dislike to his face; his habitual politeness disarmed an enemy who would disparage him behind his back. He was a trifle

Digitized by Google

small of stature for a man, though well proportioned; and he did much to overcome what he lacked in stature by assuming an erect carriage and a dignified air. He was fastidious as to dress, observing scrupulous neatness, and wearing the finest clothes, even on the plantation; which, when taken with his trim figure, his soft, dark eyes, and silken mustache, often evoked the term "dandy planter."

But whatever there might be of effeminateness about Basel Mollison, lay entirely in outward appearance; for he was known to be a cool hand at cards, and he could set a lively pace for hard drinkers. One other accomplishment should not be overlooked by those likely to cross him; at thirty paces he could put the six bullets of his revolver into the space of a silver dollar.

This talented young planter had been strikingly successful in all his undertakings save one, that of laying siege to the heart of Sally Heath. In this venture his efforts were still clouded in uncertainty; but he was not on that account the least discouraged. He had had much experience in such matters, and had never failed to win a heart he had fixed his fancy upon; why should he now? To him there was but one answer.

It was in pursuance of this idea, as the Captain had surmised, that he was now a passenger on the Amaryllis, having gone to the city solely for the purpose of being on the boat when Miss Sally should come aboard at the Convent on the return

Digitized by Google

trip. He knew that she would come home at this time because of word sent him by his great-aunt, Josephine Legarde, the little old French-woman who always met the boat at the landing. Madam Legarde was also aunt to Sally's mother, and now exercised such supervision over the niece as was permitted by the rules of the school, and did all she could to further the suit of her nephew.

Mollison's pride had been touched by Miss Sally's indifference since coming aboard; and he particularly resented the interference of the Captain. This was an unexpected turn that for a time disconcerted his plans. But no one would have suspected his savage humor from his outward calm.

"What a pity," he said with an engaging smile, as he escorted Miss Heath to the pilot-house after breakfast, "Captain Ingram hasn't a faster boat in this trade."

"Why, Mr. Mollison," she exclaimed, stopping midway on the steps leading to the hurricane deck, and gazing at him in wide-eyed astonishment. "I reckon there isn't a boat on the river that can pass the Amaryllis." And then, after a withering glance, she added, "If you're in such haste you'd better take the cars at Baton Rouge."

"Oh, indeed," he quickly added, "I'm in no hurry. In such company, the longer the journey the shorter the time."

She tossed her head at the compliment, and he ventured at self-vindication by saying: "I was

Digitized by Google

merely thinking of the complaint you made to the Captain about the speed of his boat."

"Who, me? The idea!" They had reached the upper deck, and she turned on him such a look of astonishment that he all but doubted his own senses. "Why, Captain Ingram and I were quarrelling the whole blessed time because he wants to put me off this boat before I get enough to eat — and he knows well enough we don't get a bite that's decent at the old school."

"Then it will be all the better," the discomfited young man began, in an effort to fall in with some fleeting humor, "to get home so soon. You must long to get back to Daphne."

"Don't talk to me 'bout Daphne, with its musty old house, and shiftless niggers, and — "

"And the tiresome old Colonel," he suggested as she paused.

She merely flashed him a defiant glance, and led on to the stairway at the after end of the texas. Ascending this they were soon at the door of the pilot-house, where they were warmly greeted by the affable Lewison. Early as it was there were several passengers before them, Mrs. Fitzhugh of Harrisonburg, Mrs. Davidson and daughter of Columbia, the Misses Darlington of the Lost Hope plantation on Boeuf River, and three gentlemen. The ladies were perched upon the high bench at the back of the pilot-house, while the gentlemen stood about in such places as appeared to be out of Lewison's way, as he shifted

Digitized by Google

from side to side of his wheel, and still not interfere with the ladies' view.

The pilot-house, being the highest habitable spot on the boat, embraced surpassing merits as an observatory; and when to this was added the spicy small talk of the loquacious Lewison, its capacity was generally taxed to the utmost when he was on watch. Lewison was personally acquainted with almost every white man and woman on the river between New Orleans and Monroe, and his flattery of the ladies and stories for the gentlemen made him a popular entertainer.

"Here comes my partner," the smiling pilot exclaimed, as Miss Heath and her escort entered. "I wondered if she'd forgotten this was her watch."

"I don't know if I want to have anything to do with such a slow-poke of a boat," she answered, giving her head a toss. Ignoring the action of the ladies, who edged along to make room for her on the bench, she perched herself on the high stool at the pilot's right.

"How comes it you didn't take the Dauphine," he asked, referring to the opposition boat, "if you were in such a hurry?"

"La, Mr. Lewison, I didn't want to get to Daphne so quick nobody 'd be at the landing to meet me."

So the two continued to banter each other, and for the most part monopolize the conversation, save for the occasional remarks of Mrs. Fitzhugh

Digitized by Google

and Mr. Mollison, who seemed to be the only ones to venture to take part. Now and again the pleasing panorama passing before them claimed attention. The broad Mississippi bent in great sweeping curves this way and that between the grass-covered levees. Upon either hand were the magnificent residences of the opulent sugar planters, gem-set in groves of live-oaks; while back of them, and at a respectful distance, were the long rows of negro quarters, with the great fertile fields stretching from the river bank to the timbered swamp in the rear. Any one of these plantations comprised an estate that might have aroused the envy of a prince.

The two-hundred-mile strip of cultivated land at the lower end of the Mississippi, which has been reclaimed from the flood waters by means of a vast system of levees, like the narrow valley of the Nile, is seldom five miles wide on either side of the river — sometimes not more than one — but, like the valley of the Nile, its great fertility enables it to support a large population.

"Whose estate is that?" one of the gentlemen, evidently a traveler from the north, inquired, pointing to one of the most showy plantations on the "Coast."

"That," Lewison answered, "is the Boliere place. The Bolieres were one of the oldest of the Creole families of Louisiana, and one of the few that made any effort to keep up with the times. That house cost a hundred thousand

Digitized by Google

dollars in gold before the War. You should see its furnishings, works of art, and all that sort of thing. Old Joseph Boliere died recently — last of the family — fine old gentleman" — the boat was coming out of an eddy under the point, and was dodging about so much that the pilot jerked out his sentences between snatches at the wheel — "always had something on the sideboard for friends and strangers — open house — old style hospitality." He paused till the boat had cleared the eddy, and then went on: "I understand a rich merchant in New Orleans has offered to buy it as a wedding present for his son if he will marry." He threw a meaning look at Mollison, and then turning to the girl on the stool he inquired, "Miss Sally, how would you like to be the bride of the owner of that plantation?"

"What foolishness you talk, Mr. Lewison. If I ever marry, which I don't reckon I ever will, I'm going to marry a man, not a plantation."

"Rather a well-appointed farm," commented the stranger, ignoring the badinage between the pilot and the girl. Then, after carefully surveying its thousands of well-tilled acres a moment he added, "I don't wonder now at these sugar planters being so hot for a protective tariff, but what the cotton planters — "

"Oh, there comes a boat!" Miss Sally cried, eager to forestall a political argument—it was the one subject she could take no part in, and she

Digitized by Google

wilted at the very sound of the word "tariff."
"Let me blow for her, will you, Mr. Lewison?"

"When we get closer," the humoring pilot answered. "She could scarcely hear us so far; and I might change my mind about which side I wanted."

For some time the Amaryllis had been bowling along in slack water under the point, but having struck the full current again she began to cross to the other side of the river.

"Oh, Mr. Lewison," Mrs. Fitzhugh exclaimed, when she saw what he was doing, "why don't you follow this shore? I did so want to see that house yonder." She pointed to a large dwelling in the bend.

"Beg pardon, Mrs. Fitzhugh," the obliging pilot returned, throwing her a smile, "I always like to accommodate a lady, but it's more than my job 's worth if the Captain caught me bucking up against the current in that bend — I reckon it would add an hour to our time."

As if to lend point to his words, Captain Ingram at that moment appeared on the hurricane deck.

"There, now," Miss Sally cried, shaking her finger at the pilot, "the Captain's watching you; you'd better look sharp."

The pilot was pleased to have her talk so to him. There was a fascination in her manner, in her tone, and in the way she said "betteh look sha'p."

Digitized by Google

But the commanding officer evidently had other matters in mind, for his eye was on a small log raft the Amaryllis was approaching. As it came abreast, and the half dozen raftsmen stood staring at the boat, the Captain was seen to hurl toward them with all the might of his long arm some sort of missile. It sailed far out into the air, but fell into the water a hundred feet short of its destination. One of the raftsmen was heard to shout something, but the ladies in the pilot-house could not understand whether it was defiance or thanks. Another man jumped into a skiff, and rowed toward the floating missile.

"La, Mr. Lewison," Mrs. Fitzhugh exclaimed, "do you reckon Captain Ingram thought he could hit one of those men?"

The pilot laughed. "That's one of the skipper's fads. He's always throwing papers to raftsmen and flatboatmen — that was a newspaper tied up in a wad."

"How very remarkable," she commented. And then added, as the man in the skiff picked up the paper, "but I reckon it does seem good to the poor fellows to get some news before they get to the city."

Interest returned to the approaching steamer, now near enough to take definite form. Presently Lewison announced it to be the Pargaud.

"How can you tell when so far away?" Mrs. Fitzhugh inquired.

"Same as you can tell a friend before you

Digitized by Google

can see his features—boats differ as much as people."

When the approaching steamer was within three-quarters of a mile, the pilot said to Miss Sally, "Blow for the starboard."

Had he told her how many times to blow she would have resented the reflection on her nautical knowledge with some impertinent remark, for she prided herself on a considerable understanding of the rules of boating. Springing from the high stool, she put her foot on the whistle lever. It was such a little foot, such a very little foot that was exposed to view when she drew back the pink skirt — Mrs. Fitzhugh was heard to whisper to Mrs. Davidson, "she just wants to show these men the size of her shoe," — that it slipped off when the lever was halfway down, and resulted only in a hoarse whisper from the great whistle that towered above the pilot-house, and a nervous laugh from the impetuous girl. But she quickly recovered herself, and, planting her foot firmly on the lever, bore it to the floor for one full blast. Then she scrambled back upon the stool to await the answer. Presently a burst of steam was seen above the pilot-house of the approaching boat, followed a moment later by a deep, mellow sound from her whistle.

"She's of the same opinion," said Lewison.

"Wasn't she obliged to take that side?" Mrs. Fitzhugh asked.

"No, the upstream boat blows first, but if the

Digitized by Google

downstream boat doesn't like it she can give three short blasts to stop both boats, and then blow for the other side — 'crossing the whistle' we call it."

The attention of the pilot's guests was centered for a few moments on the Pargaud, which swept by in all the majesty of a great Mississippi cotton boat with a good trip of freight and passengers. Her pilot-house, too, was filled with ladies, and the exchange of greetings as they waved to each other in passing, gave them a oneness of feeling that added to their spirits as the pilot brought the conversation back to the subject of whistles.

"It's just the same with people," he said. "Man proposes, but woman often crosses his whistle, and chooses the other fellow. Isn't that so, Mr. Mollison?"

The young man seemed to be taken aback for the moment by the unexpected personal turn, but he quickly recovered himself, and added with his nonchalant air, "It may happen if you don't blow at the right time, or if you don't blow hard enough. Great discretion is necessary in affairs of the heart."

The ladies on the high bench laughed, and looked hard at Miss Heath, but that young lady merely tossed her head, and, turning to Lewison, inquired, "How many times did you blow for the wrong side?"

"Ah, that would be telling," the gallant pilot answered.

"But why," inquired the practical Mrs. David-

Digitized by Google

son, "should the boat coming down stream have the right to cross the wishes of the boat going up?"

"The same reason, I suppose, that the woman has; she is going with the current, which carries her faster, and makes her that much more helpless."

"Yonder 's the State House!" Miss Sally cried, catching sight of the towers in the distance, and interest turned to the beautiful little capital city of Baton Rouge.

"Do you suppose," Mrs. Fitzhugh said to Mrs. Davidson, as they made their way below in the wake of Miss Heath and the young Frenchman, "she cares anything for him?"

"Shouldn't wonder," the older lady answered. "It isn't every girl that would refuse two plantations like Sterling and Boliere, with the fortune that is to follow when his father dies."

"Poor Sidney Drake!"

"Oh, well, these childhood engagements don't have much weight with some people."

Digitized by Google

Chapter III.

THE THREE RIVALS

The contest to monopolize the attention of Miss Heath was waged with varying fortunes by Captain Ingram and Basel Mollison. The Captain had won a slight advantage in the beginning by having her seated beside him at the table; but on the other hand he was handicapped by being on duty half of the time, and occupied by matters that precluded the possibility of his keeping an eye on the young lady, while Mollison was free to give her his whole attention.

Ingram had a further disadvantage in feeling that he should show no partiality among his passengers. He had hitherto been so successful in carrying out this policy during his business career, and had shown such uniform courtesy to all, that there was scarcely an unmarried lady along the river that did not consider him among the possibilities. Indeed, had he chosen to take a helpmate, his opportunities would have been wide and varied.

It was therefore with much astonishment that the passengers and crew beheld the marked attention of the sedate and courteous young Captain to the vivacious Miss Sally. The long-standing engagement between her and Sidney Drake

Digitized by Google

was well known among their friends and acquaintances, as was also the close friendship between Sidney and the Captain. Mollison's zeal was to be expected, for he had been paying her attention whenever he could slip in ahead of Sidney, but Ingram's conduct was puzzling.

As for Miss Sally, she accepted the attention as naturally as ever did princess the homage of a loyal people; and she was as capricious as the most arbitrary of tyrants.

By the time the brave steamer Amaryllis had breasted the two hundred miles of Mississippi current, swept through the ten miles of Old River, dodged around the thirty miles of Red River bends, bowled along the seventy miles of Black River, and meandered up the Ouachita as far as Daphne plantation, there was much mystification surrounding these three persons, whose every word, act and look was under close surveillance.

But there was much confusion in the forming of opinions, both the passengers and the crew being divided in their predictions as to the outcome. Old Mr. Disbrow, the first clerk, was inclined to think Mollison would carry off the honors — which opinion was shared in by Mrs. and Miss Davidson of Columbia. Grady, the first mate, and Henderson, Lewison's fellow pilot, scouted such an idea; it was clear as day, they insisted, that the Captain had won the first hand in this game of hearts. "Socrates" took

Digitized by Google

refuge behind the old saying that only a fool would try to predict the verdict of a petit jury or the kind of man a pretty girl would marry. But on one point all were agreed: That Sidney Drake should bestir himself if he wished to retain Miss Sally's heart.

In the minds of at least two of the actors there was no less confusion. Captain Ingram, with that deliberate conscientiousness for which he was so generally known, and wholly unmindful of how his conduct would appear to others, had striven his utmost to prevent his friend's fiancee from receiving too much attention from a rival. He was inclined to think that, on the whole, his efforts had been crowned with a reasonable amount of success, though he frankly confessed himself puzzled by what seemed to him to be a waning of Miss Sally's interest in Sidney. When he was loudest in his friend's praise she showed but indifferent interest. Even his glowing account of the young man's fine appearance — due, as the Captain delicately hinted, to his having given up cards and liquor — received no more comment than might have been provoked by a report on the prospects of the next season's cotton crop, or the stage of water in the Ohio River.

The Captain undoubtedly would have worried more over this state of affairs had he thought it denoted a change of allegiance from Sidney to Basel; but when the most careful analysis failed to establish the truth of that suspicion, he dis-

Digitized by Google

missed it as baseless, and settled down to the conviction that no one could understand a woman — not even herself.

Basel Mollison himself was uncertain as to the progress of his suit. The unexpected change from a dual contest, which he had hitherto been waging, to the tri-rivalry — for he had no doubt that Ingram was acting for himself — set his plans awry. He had flattered himself for some time past that he had detected a waning in the fortunes of Sidney Drake, which, in his conceit, he had construed as a sign favorable to himself; but when the Captain had entered the lists with such apparent zeal, matters assumed a different aspect. Of one thing he was satisfied by the time he had reached Sterling plantation: He was convinced that the real contest for Miss Sally's heart lay between Captain Ingram and himself; and he was equally certain that he had a plan for driving the new rival from the field. He had but to play upon his father's vanity and prejudices to bring financial ruin upon the presumptuous Captain.

As for Miss Sally herself — but who would be so bold and presumptuous as to peep into a maiden's heart and spy out its treasure-trove?

When the Amaryllis finally pushed her nose into the bank at Daphne, and lowered her stage for the out-pouring stream of boxes, barrels, bales and bundles, and the incoming stream of men and children, ranging in hue from the fairest Cau-

Digitized by Google

casian to the darkest Congo black, Miss Sally's eyes were fixed eagerly upon the form of an old man at the head of the procession, who had much difficulty in avoiding the trotting roustabouts. She had already greeted him with handkerchief-wavings, while the boat was still in mid-stream, and with smiles when she drew nearer the bank; but when he at last reached the head of the stairs leading to the boiler deck, she threw her arms about him in a convulsive embrace that all but carried him off his feet.

Next came Sidney Drake, the handsome young planter who had ridden down from Penelope plantation expressly to greet the home-returning young lady, whose smiling face bore a striking contrast to that of the scowling Mollison, who now stood apart by the forward rail, pretending an interest in the unloading of freight. Sidney was too happy for the time-being even to notice the presence of his rival.

"And you've brought my little charmer back safe and sound," the old man said, extending his hand to the Captain.

"Better say she brought us back," Ingram answered, bowing to Miss Heath. "She has been our mascot — lost seven hours in the fog before she came aboard — nothing's happened since."

"You don't surprise me, sir," — the old man's voice betrayed his emotion — "if there ever was a charmer that could clear the skies and keep off evil spells, I reckon this is the one.

Digitized by Google

He wound his long arm about her as he spoke, and drew her slight form to him, while she, with mischievous eyes flashing from one to the other exclaimed.

"How yo' all talk. I'm no voodoo doctor."

"'Deed, honey," the Colonel exclaimed, "I never saw voodoo charms work like yours," — a sentiment in which Basel and Sidney silently acquiesced.

The greetings and pleasantries were followed by a few words of business between the Captain and Colonel Heath, receipts and bills of lading were exchanged with Disbrow, and then the old man, ever mindful of others, cried, "Come, children, we must get ashore and let this boat go on up the river about her business. Come, Sally; my, my! Won't your tongue ever tire? Fetch her along, Sidney. Good-bye, Captain; good-bye, Guy," turning to Lewison; "good-bye, Mr. Disbrow — I reckon you were right about that missing package last trip — good-bye. Why, howdy, George?" extending his hand to the steward who had just come out of the cabin. "Well, good-bye, everybody, and good luck." When half-way down to the forecastle he called back: "I reckon I'll have about fifty bales for you when you come down, Captain."

In the meantime Miss Sally also had been making her adieus, giving a smile and a word to each officer and passenger within reach. Nor did she forget the sulking Mollison who had re-

Digitized by Google

mained for the most part with his back to the little company, but who now came forward with his best manner to greet Sidney. It was so unusual for Basel to let his feelings get the better of him that he now seemed ashamed of himself, and endeavored to remove the impression. The two rival planters were so intent upon watching each other that neither of them noticed the prolonged handclasp and the peculiar look that Miss Sally gave the Captain.

As she tripped down the stairs after the Colonel, Sidney lingered a moment to ask the Captain aside: "Do you reckon he made any headway?"

"I don't think so, Sidney; but we never can tell. I did what I could for you."

"And I'm powerful grateful, Captain; I surely am."

"But he means business. He won't stop at anything to gain his point. Be careful how you conduct yourself."

"I surely will, Captain. I haven't touched a drop or seen a card since I swore off."

"That's the stuff, Sidney," Ingram responded heartily, gripping his hand. And then he added in a half bantering tone: "Now if you'll fix up that landing of yours so we can get in and out, I'll think you really have reformed."

The young planter cast him a look of mingled reproach and embarrassment, and then burst into a good-natured laugh.

Digitized by Google

"Captain, 'pon my honor, I did intend to make that roadway, and I told the men to be sure and do it before you got back this trip; but you know a nigger 'll never do anything unless you stand right over him with a whip. But I'll have that landing fixed before you come down, sure."

The Captain smiled incredulously, as the young man hurried after the Colonel and Miss Sally.

When the Amaryllis had cleared Daphne landing, and the wavings and hat-liftings were done, Mollison returned to the forward end of the boiler deck, where, seated in a chair tipped back till his shoulders touched a stanchion, while his feet rested on the railing in front, he lighted a fresh cigar, and gazed thoughtfully up the beautiful Ouachita. Captain Ingram tried to busy himself about affairs on board, but found his mind continually reverting to Daphne. No matter what subject was under consideration he was haunted by the face of the girl who had just gone ashore. He was at a loss to understand why there should be such a void in the life aboard. More than half the passengers still remained, yet to him the cabin seemed empty. He was vexed with himself for thinking about it.

After vainly trying to grasp some business details that Mr. Disbrow set before him, he made some excuse, and went to his room in the forward part of the texas. Here, stretched at full length on a couch in the seclusion of his little cabin, he

Digitized by Google

idly watched the wreaths of smoke ascending from his cigar, and abandoned himself to his fancies.

He had known Sally Heath nearly the whole of her life, for he had seen her when he made the first trip with his father, on the old steamer Palmyra. She was then a slender slip of a girl, of five or six years, and seemed all eyes and hair. His attention had been attracted to the child partly because of her striking appearance, but more because of the fact that she had lost her parents in the wreck of the Creole State. The great black eyes that blazed in her thin face, and the immense shock of black hair that tumbled about her shoulders seemed a badge of mourning for the disaster, though the inborn spirit of mischief contradicted them. He now recalled, as he watched the smoke-wreaths, how he had seen the child grow from that little bundle of nervous energy into the capricious girl who was sent down on the boat to the Convent. At that time he was serving as "cub" under Lewison, and was too much engrossed with mastering the art of piloting to pay serious attention to girls.

Later, when his father, on account of the growing infirmities of age, had been compelled to retire from active business, leaving him in command of the debt-encumbered boat, he found himself surrounded by such a multitude of charmers that, like the fabled ass between two bundles of straw, he had been unable to make a choice; and like the before-mentioned ass, that starved with-

Digitized by Google

in reach of plenty, he had allowed his heart to fall asleep in the midst of the sirens' songs. To his mother's suggestion, and his father's advice, that it would be well for him to marry, he had always made answer: "Bye and bye; when the right one comes along—and the Amaryllis is out of debt."

For a time he really had tried to conform to his parents' wishes, and had discreetly cast about for a companion; but for some reason, unexplainable even to himself, he had long ago given up the search, and had accepted philosophically the fate of bachelorhood. He appreciated his popularity with the ladies, no less than with the gentlemen — and no man on the river stood higher with either — but his heart still remained untouched.

Captain Ingram's personal appearance would have been striking, even had he occupied a less conspicuous position. He was tall and spare like his father, old "Jerry" Ingram, and his features were moulded on the same large scale, betokening a generous and resourceful character. The vigorous clasp of his sinuous hand gave assurance of sincerity. His deep-set grey eyes were intense, beaming with kindness upon friends, but, as Wedgwood graphically put it, "flashing thunder and lightning on the enemy." His mouth and chin indicated firmness and steadfastness of purpose; while his large ears brought him well within the pale of the generous hearted.

"Davy ain't handsome," old Captain Jerry often remarked to his wife, "but I guess he'll do

Digitized by Google

to tie to just the same, eh, Mary?" And the mother always responded with that look of pride that falls to the lot of a favored child.

David Ingram had grown to the business. He had not only retained the esteem of his father's friends, but he had won the regard of the greater part of the younger generation. It is doubtful if there is any other commercial enterprise in which the personal equation counts for so much as in the management of a Mississippi steamboat. If a railroad president who met shippers and passengers personally, fixed rates, settled claims, and determined train schedules, all of his own volition, were to be joined to a merchant who was acquainted with all his customers and their families, and these to a host who mingled familiarly with his guests, and they to an autocratic employer whose arbitrary authority was little short of the absolute, and all were to be rolled into an agreeable gentleman, that personage might convey some idea of the versatility of a good Mississippi steamboat captain during the palmy days.

Such environment and responsibilities naturally had a pronounced effect upon the development of character; and while comparatively few were capable of responding fully to the opportunities, those who did were to be counted among the men worth knowing.

David's father had been one of the oldest of the "old timers," beginning with a boat between Louisville and St. Louis, later running between

Digitized by Google

the latter city and New Orleans, and winding up finally in the Ouachita trade. As the elder Ingram worked his way southward he came more and more into the realm of the personal equation. In the "up-river" trade he became acquainted with a few shippers, the [illegible] boatmen and warehouse tenders, and the people who traveled up and down the river — the latter for the most part, tourists who made the trip but once. But in the tributary trade, where there were but few towns, and those small and insignificant, and where the boat landed at each shipper's place, the captain became personally acquainted not only with the planters, but also with their wives and children, and even with the negroes.

Under such circumstances it was inevitable that a strong character should have warm friends and bitter enemies. His friends would travel and ship on his boat only; and when ordering supplies from New Orleans they would give their orders to their friend's boat. Those who disliked the Captain would transfer readily to another, and talk of their hard usage to all the shippers they met.

[illegible] individuality extended to the crew [illegible] the mates, the engineers, [illegible] as officers, [illegible] lounged in [illegible] with the passenger experience, and [illegible]

Digitized by Google

accustomed to meeting strangers from all parts of the world, they generally possessed a charm of manner and a gift of entertaining narrative that was always popular with the traveling public.

This was the atmosphere in which the character of David Ingram had been formed. It meant even more to him than to most men, because he had attained the age of thirty-five without coming under the influence of wife or children. It was this man who, in behalf of his most intimate friend, ten years his junior, had attempted to intercede with a most bewitching young lady. He had undertaken the self-appointed task as disinterestedly and as conscientiously as he would have done any friendly act. He had known Sidney Drake from earliest boyhood, and, in common with nearly every one else who knew the young planter, had succumbed to his fascinating manner. So great, indeed, was his regard for Sidney that even when the card scandal occurred, he had remained steadfast in championing the disgraced young man, and re-establishing his standing in the community.

He had been actuated in this, however, not only by his regard for Sidney, but also by his admiration for Mrs. Drake, the brave little woman who had made such a heroic effort to rear her son, and to clear the plantation of the indebtedness hanging over it at the time of her husband's death.

It was one of the strange anomalies of life that

Digitized by Google

this sweet-natured woman, whom all upright men were eager to serve, should have been crossed by the one person in all the world who professed to love her most, her son. This son, who worshipped his mother, idolized his sweetheart, and was ready to die for his friends, had yet allowed himself to be drawn into associations that led to drinking and gambling—culminating at last in the card scandal.

Sidney's natural generosity, his very charm of person and mind, had led to his undoing. But the indispensable requisite to good character that he lacked, the ability to say "no," was possessed to an extraordinary degree by David Ingram. It was the firmness of the Captain that had got Sidney out of the card trouble; it was the same sterling quality that was now enlisted in his behalf.

But in exerting himself in behalf of his friend to ward off the attentions of Basel Mollison, Ingram was courting financial disaster to himself. Old Henri Mollison had long nursed a grudge against Captain Jerry Ingram, which David's independent manner had done little to allay; and the lurking desire to avenge himself on the father by disciplining the son was now fanned into flame by the envious Basel.

It is possible that the old boatstoreman had not intended to put the Whistler into the Ouachita trade when he bought her, for Ingram was not the only independent captain who invited dis-

Digitized by Google

ciplining, but when he received the letter written by his son, his course was taken.

"The arrogant captain needs humbling," the young Frenchman wrote his father immediately upon his arrival at his plantation, "and his crew, as well, should be taught a lesson. Could you have heard, as I did, their flippant remarks about you, and the vulgar laughter that greeted the cheap jests at your expense, you would no longer hesitate to put in an opposition boat.

"The very fact that he refuses to buy his stores of you is a standing challenge. Let him feel the weight of your little finger. Bring the boaster to his knees."

Digitized by Google

Chapter IV.

THE OLD COLONEL AND HIS NIECE

While the Amaryllis, with her sorely-troubled Captain, wended her way up the placid Ouachita, her whistle sounding fainter and fainter as she landed at succeeding plantations, Miss Sally entertained Sidney and the Colonel as they walked to the house. The old man was at her right, with one hand clinging to her arm, and the other grasping a stout cane to steady his steps; Sidney was at her left holding her other arm; and all three talked and laughed over the little nothings that crowd into the minds of friends after a long separation.

They had gone not more than half the distance, however, when the Colonel thought of something left at the landing, and bade his young companions to walk on while he went back after it. Ah, the sly old Colonel, to divine so well the lovers' desire for privacy! Brave, generous old Colonel, to stifle the longings of his own heart for the sake of another!

Slowly as the young couple walked they had reached the steps leading to the gallery of the house before the uncle overtook them, and Sidney was bidding Miss Sally good-bye, preparatory to making a hard ride across the country to anticipate the Amaryllis at his own plantation.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, Uncle, it's so good to be at home again with you."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"Of course I had to come down to Daphne to see you," he was saying as the Colonel came up, " and I wouldn't go up on the boat, for then I'd have no chance to talk with you — and I surely couldn't miss that."

With a hasty farewell to the uncle, and a warm response to the invitation to "come again," Sidney ran down the path to the gate where Turby, his favorite riding horse, patiently awaited the pleasure of his master, threw himself into the saddle, and was soon out of sight on his way to catch the boat at Penelope. The girl watched him till he disappeared, answering his farewell wave of the hand, as he sped around the bend of the road, and then turned with a sigh to the old man by her side, exclaiming, as she threw her arms about his neck:

"Oh, Uncle, it's so good to be at home again with you."

"And Sidney," he added, returning her caress.

"Yes, and Sidney," she repeated slowly, after a pause.

At that moment a large, fleshy negro woman came waddling out of the house, her good-natured face wreathed in smiles of welcome.

"Heah's mah sugah-plum! You did come home fo' Christmas, sho' 'nough. I'z pow'ful glad to see you, Sugah."

"That sounds likely," said the girl in a tantalizing tone, "when I've been here all this time, and you never came near me."

Digitized by Google

"La, Marse Harry, did you heah dat? An' me jes' a tippletoein' 'round heah, a-waitin' fo' Mistah Sidney to go. 'Cose, Sugah, yo' ol' mammy got mo' sense 'n to 'rupt you when yo' sweethaw't 's heah. G'way, dah," she cried, interrupting herself, and aiming a kick at one of the dogs that was fawning upon her young mistress. "Dey gwine to spoil yo' pretty cloz, Sugah. You Jim and Henry" — she turned to two little darkies who had been looking on from a discrete distance—"call off dem dawgs. Dey's de awnriest dawgs in de pa'ish — make haste, chil'en."

"And where is Celestine?" inquired the girl, rescuing her skirt from the paws of the too demonstrative dogs.

"Bless you, chile, dat Cel'steen ain't got no mo' sense 'n a crazy mule — 'deed she ain't. What yo' reckon dat fool niggah doin' dis minit?"

As neither the uncle nor the niece hazarded a guess, the old woman exclaimed with all the explosive force of her lungs:

"Powd'n!"

Miss Sally greeted it with a peal of laughter, in which the Colonel joined more out of sympathy than from any sense of humor there might be in what he called a "fool nigger's prank."

"It's jes' like I say, Sugah. Dat ah trifln' niggah use mo' flowah to make huhse'f look like whitefolks 'n I takes to make braid. You Cel'steen," she called in stentorian tones, "come heah dis minit."

Digitized by Google

In response to the peremptory summons there appeared in the hallway a slender girl whose naturally good looking face, though several shades lighter than her mother's, had been rendered a deathly grey by the mingling of white flour with the natural hue of the skin. She was a little younger than her mistress, though taller, and was dressed in glaring colored cheap cloth, fashioned in imitation of that worn by the white ladies. Her feet were clad in shoes much too small, causing her excruciating pain, and an awkward limp as she walked; and her crisp, kinky hair had been coaxed into a rude coiffure, that accentuated the bumps of her oddly-shaped head.

"Now, jes' look at dat niggah," the indignant Cynthia exclaimed in disgust, "a-standin' dah like a lame buzza'd."

The girl thus addressed cast a reproachful look at her mother and advanced with mincing steps to greet her mistress.

"I's mos' excel'ntly glad to see you," she said, adding as she bowed low over the hand held out to her, "I hopes you is enjoyin' yo' unusual good health."

"What kind a talk dat ah, niggah?" burst out the mother. "Whah you get such mannahs? I reckon I's got to knock some sense into you fool haid!"

But the young mistress, looking upon it all as a joke, succeeded in appeasing the wrath of the disgusted mother, and together they entered the

Digitized by Google

house, Cynthia carrying the hand satchel, and her daughter hobbling along in the rear, slyly draping over her own shoulders the light wrap that Miss Sally had laid aside upon reaching the gallery.

The home of the Heaths was the typical cotton planter's house of the more modest sort, consisting of a wide hall running from front to rear, with two large, high-ceilinged rooms on each side, and an extension at the back embracing a dining room and kitchen. The roof, which sloped to the front and to the rear, extended enough beyond the building proper to make a broad, roomy gallery in front, the width of the house, and another at the back. The red brick chimneys at either end of the house were built on the outside and rose from the ground up through the eaves at the peak of the roof, making provision for the large, old-fashioned open fire-places, with red brick hearths, huge andirons, and plain mantels. The house itself was set upon posts eight feet from the ground, to clear it from water in case of a possible overflow from a breaking of the Mississippi levees.

The two halves of the house, divided by the wide central hall, were duplicates, that on the north, occupied by Colonel Heath, consisting of the two large rooms, the front, in which was the fire-place, serving as office, library and sitting room, and the rear room as bedchamber. Both were plainly furnished. Above the smoke-stained

Digitized by Google

mantel in the front room was an oil painting of a sweet-faced young lady in an old-fashioned gown. Upon the right, and a little lower, hung an engraving of General Lee, while on the left was one of General Jackson, the two idolized officers under whom the Colonel had served. The furniture was simple, a few plain, split-bottom chairs with straight backs, a small table, and a well-stocked bookcase. In the corner of the room farthest from the fire-place stood a ponderous bed, for chance guests, its massive posts supporting a red tester, from which was draped the ubiquitous mosquito-bar.

The niece occupied the corresponding suite of rooms on the south side of the hall. While these were by no means luxuriously furnished, there were enough of modern conveniences, ornaments, and decorations to make a striking contrast with the Colonel's apartments. As the young mistress now entered the room she was greeted by a warm blaze of pine knots crackling in the fire-place, and sending a cheerful glow over walls and furniture. The air without, on this mid-winter's day, was just cool enough to make a fire within doors appreciated. For a few moments the girl stood in the doorway silently drinking in the scene. Apparently everything was as she had left it when she had gone to school in the fall. Before the fire-place stood the great stiff and stately arm-chair that had come down as an heirloom from former generations. Beside the ponderous chair

Digitized by Google

was a graceful rattan rocker. A fancifully-designed French clock occupied the center of the mantel, flanked upon either side by small statues of cupids in the pose of muses. Above the mantel hung portraits of her father and mother, upon which her eyes lingered pensively for a moment. The furniture of the room was of a composite nature, a mingling of the heavy style of former generations, stiff and comfortless, with the light, graceful order of the modern, which gave to the room a quaint look, but withal a cosy, restful, inviting air.

Tears were in the girl's eyes as she looked from one to another of the familiar objects.

"Dah, now," Cynthia exclaimed, with a look of pride on her honest face, "it am all jes' as you lef' it." Then, going to the door that led into the rear room, she waved her hand in a way to indicate proprietorship, and added: "It am all jes' as you lef' it, Sugah."

The girl, without waiting to remove her hat, or otherwise to attend to her toilet, led the old man to the arm-chair facing the fire, and seated herself beside him — there was ample room for their slender bodies between its generous arms. He did not speak; but his fascinated gaze was continually upon her face, watching the changes from her varying moods. Nor did she for some time break the silence. Her emotions had so overcome her that she knew not whether to laugh or to cry.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, Uncle," she exclaimed, throwing her arms about his neck and passionately kissing the kindly face bent down to hers, "you don't know how good it is to be at home again. I'm never, never going away any more. I got so tired of the Academy, and the plain gowns of the Sisters, and the girls all dressed so plain, and the rules, and everything — oh, I was just dying to see you."

"And Sidney?" he added with a rising inflection.

"And Sidney," she repeated slowly, after a pause.

Colonel Henry Heath, the elder of two sons born on a tobacco plantation in Virginia, had been educated for the law, but meeting with an overwhelming misfortune in the death of his fiancee, almost upon the eve of their marriage, he lost all ambition to practice his profession. Instead, he wandered aimlessly about the world for a number of years seeking diversion. After his younger brother had married and settled on a cotton plantation on the Ouachita River, he spent much of his time there, assisting in overseeing the place, but more commonly with reading, and sometimes in writing, for he had dabbled a little in fiction, and once essayed a history of Louisiana, but the work had never been completed.

When little Sally came to bless the union of the happy husband and wife, the elder brother found himself so bewitched by the child that

Digitized by Google

thenceforth he made Daphne his home, from whence his wanderings grew less and less frequent, till the breaking out of the Civil War. One of the first to cast in his lot with the South, he remained at the front till the end of hostilities; and sheathed his sword only at the command of the beloved general of his native state. After the close of the war, the confusion and strife incident to the "reconstruction," and the mending of ruined fortunes, so occupied his time and attention, that he came to be looked upon as one of the resident planters.

It was at this time, when matters were beginning to assume some sort of order, and fortune to smile on the sorely stricken country, and when he felt a re-awakening of his early hopes and ambitions, that the brother and wife were lost in a steamboat disaster. Naturally he had assumed the guardianship of the child, as well as the direction of the plantation. Those of his neighbors, particularly of the feminine order, who had taken it upon themselves before to plan for him matrimonial alliances, now renewed their zeal. But despite all their friendly machinations, he remained faithful to the memory of his first love.

There was a time, it is true, when his solicitude for the affairs of Mrs. Drake, after the death of her husband, led many to think he had met his fate; and, indeed, for a considerable period the Colonel himself seriously thought of offering his hand to the handsome young widow. Just why

Digitized by Google

he did not do so no one knew, for it was the general belief among mutual friends that she would gladly have accepted the offer. She and the Colonel, however, had remained the best of friends, and seemed to have found mutual satisfaction in planning the union of the son and niece.

The Colonel, instead of marrying after the death of his brother, installed as housekeeper his spinster sister Ann, a nervous, fussy old lady, whose prim precision seemed only to engender the opposite qualities in the child. But when Sally was ten this strained relation was interrupted by the death of the old lady. The guardian's next recourse was to place his charge in the care of Madame Legarde, the little old Frenchwoman who lived at the Convent, and who was great aunt to the child. It was there she had lived the following ten years, with the exception of the summer vacations which were spent with her uncle at Daphne.

It was these long absences from home that had made possible the match between Sally and Sidney; for, had they remained together all the time, it is quite certain that the few white children in the neighborhood would not have offered sufficient diversion to prevent satiety. As it was, the long separations, together with the restraints of convent life, were the very things needed to further the schemes of the elders. Even with this advantage, however, the greatest care was necessary to prevent the carefully arranged plans from

Digitized by Google

coming to naught. What with Miss Sally's spirit, and her uncle's indulgence, she had developed an individuality that leaped all bounds, and an independence that brooked little opposition.

But wise as the Colonel was, one point in Sally's nature seemed to be beyond his comprehension, her inborn contrariety. He had not fully grasped the idea that the surest way of getting her to do a certain thing was to oppose it. It is altogether likely, indeed, that the match would have been broken off long ago, but for the uncle's emphatic condemnation of Sidney at the time of the card scandal. The Colonel was so wrought up over it, and so determined to break the engagement, that it aroused all the girl's spirit; and so valiantly did she champion the cause of the disgraced young man, that her waning love was fanned into new life.

The reverse of this happened when, after the reconciliation between the Colonel and Sidney, the uncle criticised her for permitting the attentions of Basel Mollison. Thus it happened that the young Frenchman had two allies working in his behalf: his aunt, Madame Legarde, who so cleverly played upon the girl's affections, and the doughty Colonel, who opposed his suit.

Hence the reluctant response as the girl beside the old man in the great arm-chair gazed meditatively into the fire:

"And Sidney."

Digitized by Google

Chapter V.

THE FATE OF THE BLASPHEMER

"How many men, Captain?"

"Fifty, Mike; we have a big up-freight, and the rains will make the banks bad — better ship fifty."

"How much?"

"Don't go over eighty dollars."

The first speaker was Grady, Michael, or, as he was familiarly know among his friends and fellow officers, Mike Grady, first mate of the Amaryllis. He was a small man, thin, nervous, and wiry, a thorough steamboatman, and the last man a stranger would pick out as a "nigger driver" with a "reputation."

It lacked but a few minutes of five o'clock, the time at which the boat was advertised to leave New Orleans; and the mate was getting instructions from the Captain regarding the shipping of the crew of roustabouts. The passengers had gathered on the boiler deck to witness the event of "leaving port," and the few packages of belated freight dumped on the wharf by the drays were being hurried aboard by the "time" men, who had been loading cargo during the day.

The Captain had rung the first warning bell, three slow, ponderous strokes three times repeated

Digitized by Google

— with an impressive interval between the series —the engineer was rolling his wheel slowly ahead to "limber up" his engines, the firemen were stoking the furnaces with the finest and dirtiest coal to be found in the bunkers, and looking up solicitously at the dense clouds of black, soot-laden smoke rolling from the tops of the tall, graceful stacks, to see if they compared favorably with like emissions from the stacks of the half-dozen other boats that were preparing to leave port.

The fireman, or stoker, on a Mississippi steamboat may never have his name written high on the roll of fame, or even be known to a half-dozen persons on the boat, but there are two occasions when he has to be reckoned with: once, on leaving port, when he tries to outdo his fellows in an attempt to smother the city in coal smoke, and again when his boat falls in with another for a trial of speed.

Out upon the levee the usual crowd of idlers and sightseers had collected to witness the departure of the Wednesday boats. Next to the Amaryllis lay the Whitney, a Red River boat, also preparing to leave, while the third boat above, the City of Vicksburg, was in the act of shipping her crew. Below Canal Street, at the sugar landing, the Pride of the Coast was backing out from the wharf.

On board the Amaryllis there was the hurry and confusion of the last few moments in port,

Digitized by Google

friends bidding passengers good-bye, nervous individuals trying to discharge forgotten commissions, and the roustabouts hurrying in the last of the freight. Now and again some mischievous "roosters" would fall to "coongining" on the stage, and their rhythmic step would set the long gangplank to swinging in a way very disconcerting to stiff-jointed people who attempted to pass in or out at the same time — to the unbounded delight of the on-looking crowd of whites and negroes.

Among the passengers witnessing this stirring scene from the vantage point of the boiler deck of the Amaryllis, were an elderly lady and her daughter, sitting close beside the forward rail near the bell rope. They were strangers, if one were to judge by the absorbing interest with which they tried to see all that happened on the forecastle and on the wharf just beyond. Presently Ingram stopped beside them, and cast a comprehensive glance below to see that all was going well.

"Captain," said the old lady, clutching at his sleeve, and turning her spectacled eyes up to his serious face, "is it not wonderful to think that all these men are the children of God!"

"It is, indeed," he answered, smiling at such an inquiry from a stranger. But the evident sincerity of the questioner prompted him to add: "And when I see the well-dressed people up here, and the rough-and-tumble crowd down there, I

Digitized by Google

don't know which is the more wonderful, the fact that all men are the children of a common Father, or that so much partiality is shown in their treatment."

"Shocking, shocking!" the old lady exclaimed —meaning, evidently, the words of the Captain, and not the condition of the beforementioned children down on deck. "Captain, I must have a talk with you."

Ingram bowed, and smiled into the reproving eyes. He glanced at the daughter, but she was so absorbed in the scene below that she had not heard her mother's words.

A tall old man approached the Captain and grasped his hand.

"Well, good-bye, Davy, I must get ashore."

"Good-bye, father; tell mother I hope she can come down to the boat next trip."

The older man looked across the river to where the Whistler lay at Algiers, undergoing repairs, and then at the name on the boatstore beyond the levee.

"The old skin-flint would have had her in beside you to-day," he said with feeling, "if he hadn't had to put in a new cylinder timber. But she'll be here next trip all right."

"Maybe not," the son urged, though without conviction. "He may want to discipline someone else."

"Oh, I don't doubt he'll be after others—just as he always has been—but you're next on the list,

Digitized by Google

Davy. I can feel it in my bones. It's fight or surrender this time."

"Well, I don't need to tell you which it will be."

The two men had walked to the head of the stairs, where they shook hands a second time, and the father made his way below, while the son returned to the forward rail, where he stood watching the gathering crowd of roustabouts on the wharf.

Never was there a more perfect exemplification in commercial life of what Adam Smith called the "higgling of the market" than is to be seen in the shipping of a crew of roustabouts at New Orleans. On the one hand is the mate, acting in behalf of the boat, who knows the number and kind of men wanted, and how much he can pay; there is no uncertainty, hesitation or confusion on his part. On the other hand are the roustabouts, numbering from a few score to as many hundred, according to the season and the number of boats in port. The size of the crew is fixed by the captain, but the wages, subject only to the limit he will pay rather than to lie in port another day, are determined by mutual agreement between the mate and the men; and the rate so fixed will be an exact expression of value under consideration at that time and on that boat.

Should the mate be a man who works his crew hard, or who abuses them, he will have to pay well for the privilege. Should there be a heavy freight

Digitized by Google

aboard, or a big trip down in prospect, that also will figure in the rate of wages. So, too, will the general treatment of the men in the matter of food, opportunities for sleep, and even the kind of weather prevailing. In short, the harder the conditions, according to the negro's point of view, the higher must be the pay; and so thorough is their means of disseminating the necessary information that every roustabout on the wharf knows exactly all the conditions and circumstances. The wages, which are rated by the month, may run from forty dollars with an "easy" mate, in good weather and with a light freight, to a hundred or a hundred and ten dollars with a "driver" and a heavy freight during the stormy season.

Captain Ingram rang the second bell, six solemn strokes in two intervals. Leave-takings by the few who had not been frightened ashore at the first warning, now followed, and there was a scurrying of people to get off. In the rear of the line that went out on the stage followed Grady, the mate. His deliberate walk and perfect aplomb marked him as a man of consequence; and being now the only one on the stage, with all other activities stopped, he was the object of every eye, both ashore and aboard.

As little Grady made his stately way toward the levee the roustabouts who had been lounging listlessly on piles of freight, or standing about in groups, talking and laughing, moved as by a common impulse toward the end of the stage

Digitized by Google

where the mate stopped. Not a man put his foot on the huge gangplank, but all stood as close as possible to it.

There was no hurrying or confusion on the part of the men. Though more than two hundred were present, not one in twenty of whom had a cent in his pocket, and all of whom knew that less than a quarter of their number would be taken, there was not the slightest manifestation of eagerness to obtain employment. Masters were they of their situation, as completely as Grady was of his; and though there was no formal union among the men, no pledges or written agreements, with fines and penalties, there was yet a oneness of accord that would have put to shame the most perfect oath-bound society.

On the broad, empty stage stood the little mate facing the crowd, his soft felt hat pulled down on his forehead in a way to accentuate the fire in his sharp blue eyes; before him, and a foot lower, were the men closely huddled in a black mass. The scene was suggestive of a harpooner in the bow of a boat preparing to strike a whale.

The laughing and talking among the men had ceased; two hundred pairs of eyes were fixed upon the fair face of the little man before them. The mate, after surveying the crowd till the silence became impressive, inquired in an indifferent tone:

"Well, boys, do you want her to-night?"

There was no response. Grady shrugged his

Digitized by Google

prim, square shoulders, and cast his eyes up the wharf to where the smoke of the Pride of the Coast could be seen rounding the point. That he hoped, or expected, or even wished, to follow that boat would never be guessed from looking at his imperturbable countenance. Presently some one in the crowd called out.

"How much?"

The tone was so indifferent that it seemed a matter of no consequence whether or not the question were answered.

"Sixty dollars," said the mate.

His answer was greeted by a great guffaw, as though it were the best of jokes. When some degree of quiet had been restored, and the grins on the dark faces had subsided into pleasant smiles, Grady again spoke. This time his tone indicated that while he was utterly indifferent as to when he left port, he would like to know, just to satisfy his curiosity, what the men thought about the matter under consideration.

"Well, boys?"

"Ninety-five," several voices called. A few faint ones said "ninety," but the greater number clung to the higher figure.

Another shrug of the prim, square shoulders, and their owner walked deliberately down the stage toward the boat with the air of one who had been relieved of an unpleasant duty. Judging from the expression on his face he would not leave port for a week. No, sir, not if

Digitized by Google

the men were begging to ship for thirty dollars; not he.

Captain Ingram had mounted to the hurricane deck, where he stood with one foot on the low rail, waiting. His cap was pushed back from his forehead as though it were no affair of his, yet not a movement in the scene below escaped his sharp eyes. This was the mate's hour. Lewison, in the pilot-house, lounged on his wheel, chatting with two young ladies who had thus early sought the popular observatory. Wedgwood, in the engine-room, moved restlessly about, opening and closing valves, while waiting for the backing bell. The steam was singing in the escape pipes, and growling and pounding in the heaters. The grimy firemen peered over the coal bunkers with grinning satisfaction at the clouds of soot-laden smoke that rolled from the stacks.

"What are they waiting for?" inquired the elderly lady by the forward rail, of a tall gentleman standing near.

"For a crew; the mate hasn't shipped his crew yet."

"Well, why doesn't he hire those men out there?"

"Ah, madam, that is the problem. They haven't fixed the wages for this trip. Just keep your eye on the little fellow down there; something will soon happen."

"Well, if I ever did see such tom-foolery," the mild-mannered old lady exclaimed. "If I wanted

Digitized by Google

to hire men, I'd hire them." She sighed, and looked resignedly at her daughter, but the latter was watching Grady.

As the mate leisurely walked down the stage some one in the crowd of black men called out "eighty-five," but he paid no attention. Half way down he stopped to read the marks at the bow and amidships of the Amaryllis, and noted with satisfaction that the nine foot mark on the stem was half under water.

"Eighty," called a voice from the crowd, followed by a chorus of "eighty-fives." At the sound of "eighty" Grady turned and walked back. There was no excitement apparent to the spectators on the boiler deck; but to those on the levee there was a look of animation on the faces of the men.

"Boys," said the mate, in a deliberate tone, "I'll give you sixty-five dollars."

Though this offer, like the first one, was greeted by a derisive laugh, it lacked the same spontaneity. A spirit of earnestness had come over the crowd, and each negro had his eyes fixed intently on the face of the little man on the stage, trying to determine the extent of his "bluff." Several voices called out "eighty-five," one or two "ninety," and a few "eighty." There was a momentary uncertainty in the minds of the men. Long experience had taught them that of all the mates running into New Orleans Grady was not to be stampeded. They knew also that Captain

Digitized by Google

Ingram would abide by Grady's decision. Though it cost the boat dearly to lie over till morning, they knew the Captain would do it if necessary to back his mate. Should he choose to sacrifice twelve or fourteen hours, he would be able to ship a crew in the morning, when, undeterred by the *esprit de corps* maintained in the crowd, men would hire for comparatively low wages. Hence it was a matter for the utmost nicety of judgment for the roustabouts to know just how far to press their demands upon the different mates.

"Seventy-five," called a hesitating voice, only to be drowned by a chorus of "nos," and a renewal of the higher demands. Grady shrugged his shoulders and turned to walk aboard the boat, but when half way down the stage he seemed to be struck with a new idea, for he retraced his steps.

"See here, you crazy niggers, I'll give you seventy dollars."

A brief silence followed the decisive words. A few men were seen to whisper to their fellows, but a general shaking of heads made it clear that the mate's offer would not be accepted. Then followed a renewal of the calls for "eighty," but with here and there a sprinkling of "seventy-fives."

As the latter grew in volume it assumed a firmness that Grady knew from long experience to be the bottom price at which roustabouts could be hired by the Amaryllis on that particular day.

Digitized by Google

He waited a few moments till the cry of "seventy-five" became general, and then drew from his pocket fifty small cards, his shipping tickets.

Instantly a transformation came over the scene. The crowd of demurely smiling negroes, not one of whom could have been hired till the rate of wages for all had been fixed, was now a collection of eager individuals, scrambling with outstretched hands for tickets.

The tableau of the harpooner in the act of striking a sleeping whale had been changed in a twinkling to the autocrat of the stock exchange in the midst of panic-stricken brokers. Men who a moment before would have scorned to put a foot on the stage were now pushed forward by those behind, till the police were obliged to interfere to keep order. So closely were the men now packed, and so eagerly did those in the rear reach over those in front, that Grady could have touched the hands of more than a hundred men without stirring from the stage.

But the mate's ordeal was not finished. The wages had been fixed, but it still remained to select the fifty best men in that struggling mass. It required quick judgment, and it took a sharp eye to see which particular gesticulating hand belonged to the particular eager face behind it. Once a shipping ticket was actually in the hand of a man, there was no grabbing by others; but there were frantic efforts to snatch the bits of cardboard from the small white hand before they

Digitized by Google

could be delivered into the brawny black fists intended.

Gesticulations were accompanied by supplications. "You knows me, Mistah Grady; I'z neveh boint out," (never burnt out, meaning exhausted). "I can beat any nigger here rollin' cotton," called another. "I never rats," cried a third. But Grady knew the boasters as well as the "rats"; and with careful deliberation he handed out his shipping tickets as his eye caught a face here and there in the clamoring throng. The task was rendered the more difficult for the reason that the men worked in pairs, and when one man was secured it was necessary to hire his partner.

The receipt of the shipping ticket completed the bargain for the trip; and each man, after receiving the coveted bit of pasteboard, shuffled down the stage to the boat, where he stood with his fellows on the forecastle, calling farewells to friends on the wharf. It had taken a quarter of an hour to fix the rate of wages: less than two minutes had sufficed to ship fifty of the best men in the crowd.

As the last roustabout "coongined" down the stage amid the plaudits of the spectators, Captain Ingram sounded one stroke of the big bell on the roof. A volunteer on the wharf let go the remaining headline, while the steam "nigger" in the forecastle spun the capstan round to hoist the stage. A second stroke of the big bell was echoed by the jingling of the backing bell in the engine-

Digitized by Google

room, and the Amaryllis moved majestically out into the stream, emitting a single blast of her whistle as she cleared the wharf.

Out into the Mississippi swept the beautiful steamer, the Captain still standing with his foot on the forward rail, the pilot watching the swing of the stern, and the passengers on the boiler deck waving to friends ashore. Below, the clattering, sputtering "nigger" that had hoisted the stage, was now drawing in the limp headline trailing in the wake of the retreating boat. A few roustabouts stowed the line in a neat coil as it came from the whirling capstan, a few more lashed the stages dead ahead, while the remainder of the crew waved and shouted farewells to their fellows on the wharf.

As the Amaryllis cleared the other boats, the pilot swung her stern down till her head was pointing up stream. Another jangling of bells in the engine-room, and the great wheel astern was reversed. While the boat was thus poised a stroke of the big bell brought the flag down from the jackstaff, and the roustabouts on the forecastle broke into a rollicking song, lined by a clear voiced tenor, and chorused by all. Slowly, as the wheel astern threw the water higher and higher, the boat gathered headway, until she was ploughing up the muddy current at full speed.

The steamboat landing passed, the men stopped singing, and the trip was begun. But before descending from the hurricane deck, the Captain

Digitized by Google

walked back to the stern, where he stood, watch in hand, and counted the revolutions of the wheel.

"Turning up all right, if she is drawing over nine feet," he said to himself, as he slipped the watch into his pocket. But the satisfied smile was checked when his eye caught the Whistler, undergoing repairs at Algiers. "I do wonder if it is my turn next." He glanced in the direction of Mollison's boatstore, but it was now hidden by the point. "Still, I suppose I ought to be thankful he let me alone while I was getting out of debt."

He turned and looked forward, his eye taking in the graceful sheer, and the perfect proportions of the boat, every line of which had been drawn by himself, and every timber of which had been placed under his personal inspection. It was his boat in a double sense, and he loved it as a father loves a child. It did not represent a large investment as such things are measured in these days, but it was complete. The Amaryllis was one of the very best of steamboats, and adapted to the trade she was in. She had made money from the beginning, till the last dollar of debt had been paid; and now, with a good crop of cotton to be brought out, she was in the way of earning for her proud young captain a snug little sum.

Whether she should lay by this snug little sum for her owner, or eat herself up in ruinous competition with the rich boatstoreman was what now lay heavily upon the Captain's mind.

Digitized by Google

"Mike" Grady was known far and wide among Mississippi boatmen as a "good" mate, that is, he was a thorough steamboatman and possessed the rare faculty of understanding human nature, the two indispensable requisites for his position. He understood the whims and caprices of the men under him, as well as their way of looking at things, and he knew how to direct the expenditure of their energies to obtain results. He was not brutal—not a "clubber"—as men of less understanding were too apt to be—though he might on occasion accentuate his copious and artistic profanity with a prod of his heavy cane. His main reliance was on the quickness to see the thing to be done, his judgment in hitting upon the right means, and the ability to make the negro understand it. Storming and ranting were foreign to his nature; he rarely lifted his voice above the pitch necessary to reach the ear intended. And while profanity was a too frequent accompaniment of his commands, it was uttered so unconsciously as to amount to little more than vigorous slang.

To see the mate fall upon an apparently inoffensive roustabout inundating him with picturesque profanity, and perhaps giving him a vigorous prod with a stick, has always been a matter of wonderment to strangers, and has given the Mississippi steamboat mate a reputation little short of that of his Satanic Majesty. The natural expectation is to see the victim resent it, or to hear

Digitized by Google

his fellows protest. But such is seldom the case; both the man and his companions know that he was shirking. He dares say nothing, and they, knowing it to be to their own interest that each should do his share, are secretly glad of it.

While Lewison was holding the Amaryllis close in to the shipping at the upper wharf, to escape the swift current of the river, and the passengers on the boiler deck were enjoying the fascinating panorama, Grady and the second clerk sat on the lower step of the forward companionway, taking down the names of the roustabouts as the men filed by. When all had been listed on the boat's books, they were divided into two watches, and the most competent man in each named as captain of the watch. It was the duty of the captain of the watch to get his men out when landings were made, or at any time the mate or captain called for them, and to exercise minor acts of supervision on deck. At small landings but one watch was called; where much freight was to be handled, or when coal or wood was to come aboard, both were called.

Scarcely had the second clerk written the last name in his book when a landing was made at the saltworks. As the two-hundred-pound bags of salt came down the stage on the backs of the roustabouts, to the accompaniment of a monotoned chant from one of the men loading at the salt pile, the passengers again pressed to the forward rail to view the scene.

Digitized by Google

"Captain, Captain," called the elderly lady, who with her daughter still remained beside the bell rope, and addressing the commanding officer as he passed, "do you hear what that man is saying?" She pointed to Grady, who stood on the forecastle near the end of the stage, stimulating the men to greater activity by means of what he considered appropriate observations and ejaculations.

"I hadn't noticed, madam," the Captain answered, coming to her side. "What is it?"

"Why, don't you hear him? Listen."

And from the forecastle came snatches of phrases and sentences such as "Step up, Pony, step up; man behind you walking on your heels. You, Hawk, going to sleep are you, ——! ——!" A jab of his cane quickened the man's pace. "Move, men, move. This is no funeral ——! ——! Don't want to stay here all night ——! ——! ——!"

"Yes," the Captain said with a smile, "that's the way the mate has of keeping the men up to the mark."

"But he is taking the name of his Creator in vain."

"Ah, I see; I hadn't noticed that—suppose I wasn't looking for it. I had been admiring the way he kept the salt coming in."

"But, Captain, just hear him; he is blaspheming. He is actually cursing his fellow creatures —cursing the children of God! Oh, it is dreadful,

Digitized by Google

dreadful!" She stopped her ears with her fingers.

"Oh, well," he answered in a soothing tone, "he doesn't mean anything by it. You see the men don't mind it."

"But he is using profanity in the presence of ladies."

"Ah!" the gallant officer exclaimed, taken aback by the unexpected charge, "that is serious."

"It is disgraceful; it is shocking; it is tempting Providence to have such a man on board."

"Perhaps Providence, too, has become accustomed to it—he has been at it a long time."

"God is slow to anger, terrible to judge, and swift to punish," the old lady said solemnly.

"Well, I'm very sorry, madam, that the mate causes you such distress, but it is too late now to get a new one."

"Then you must command him to desist."

"He might jump his job if I did that—you see yourself how autocratic he is."

The old lady threw up her hands in despair; but the daughter, who had hitherto been so interested in matters below that the Captain thought she had not heard the conversation, now spoke up.

"But, Captain," she implored, "you can plead with him. I am sure he is not as bad as he talks."

"Yes, oh, yes, certainly,"—he eagerly grasped at the means of escape—"I shall speak to him at the first opportunity."

"I shall speak to him myself," the mother said with decision, "and this very night, too. I never

Digitized by Google

could sleep with such a thing on my conscience."

"Very well," the Captain assented, much relieved at the turn of affairs, "I'll send for him as soon as we leave the landing."

But before the salt was all aboard the call for supper came, and the mother and daughter joined the procession that filed back into the cabin to the evening meal. At the table the old lady found herself seated next to the Captain, and she soon became so absorbed in her effort to convince him that it was the bounden duty of Christians to devote all their energies to carrying the Gospel to the heathen of other lands, that she forgot the sinner on board.

Next morning, however, when the Amaryllis landed at Baton Rouge, and a blundering roustabout fouled the headline in making fast, the mate's vigorous English recalled her purpose.

"Captain, Captain," she called, as the officer made a tardy attempt to get out of reach, "that wretched man is—is blaspheming."

"What a shame!" Ingram could throw a world of meaning into his deep voice when he chose. But it was hard for him to keep from smiling at her keen solicitude. "I am very sorry it distresses you; he is such a good mate."

"Oh, Captain, how can you say he is good, when he blasphemes God?"

"I mean he is an efficient mate, a man who understands his business, and can get things done. To appreciate what that means you must know

Digitized by Google

that the expense of running this boat is about thirty-six dollars an hour—sixty cents a minute —one cent every tick of the watch. Now you can see that the men who can get the boat back to port in the least time, and do the business, are the ones who make the profit. We must have pilots who can make landings without delay, who can dodge the current when going up stream, and who can take advantage of the thousand and one little things that save time. The engineers must carry steam with the least possible amount of fuel, and keep their machinery in such good order that there will be no delays from breakdowns. Every man on the boat, in fact"—clearly the Captain had mounted a hobby, and there was no stopping him—"can do something to cause delay if he doesn't understand his business. But the mate most of all. From the moment the boat touches the bank at a landing till she is again underway, everything is at a standstill, so far as getting back to New Orleans is concerned; hence, the mate who can handle roustabouts is the man to make money for the boat."

Having at last come to stopping place in his speech, he found the old lady so dazed by his torrent of words that he was emboldened to conclude with what he thought a graceful turn.

"You will readily understand, Mrs. Semperfield"—he had learned her name from the passage book—"that an ideal mate is a genius. Real mates, like poets, are born; and like poets, too,

Digitized by Google

they have their peculiarities of dress and manner; they even use a language different from common people."

"Stop, Captain," she cried, throwing up her hands in rebuke. "I cannot allow you to compare the profane utterance of that man—Oh, just hear him now!"—she put her fingers in her ears again to shut out the volley of sulphureous adjectives launched at a roustabout who had knocked the head out of a barrel of flour.

"Do you know, Captain," she continued presently, when the storm below had subsided, "there is but one comparison more inapt that you could have made. Why, my dear young man, poetry is the very flower of language; it is the voice of the spirit, the song of the soul; it places man in communion with his Creator."

So radiant was the old lady's face, and so reverent her tone as she uttered these words, that for a moment the Captain stood abashed, and took the rebuke in humble submission. A stroke of the big bell on the deck above, sounding a warning that business at the landing was done, offered an excuse for changing the subject; and when the second stroke a moment later sounded, to indicate that the boat had passed from the mate's charge to that of the pilot, he said: "I'll send for Mr. Grady and let him speak for himself."

Presently there appeared before them a slight little man, whose wideawake manner as well as his

Digitized by Google

crisp words said: "Did you send for me, Captain?"

"Yes; this lady, Mrs. Semperfield, wishes to speak to you. Miss Semperfield, Mr. Grady."

The daughter acknowledged the informal introduction with a smile; but the mother stared helplessly at the man, remarking, finally, "But, Captain, it was the mate I wished to speak to."

"This is the gentleman." There was a twinkle in the deep set grey eyes as he added: "I hope you will be able to show him the error of his ways."

Mrs. Semperfield was so intently occupied in scrutinizing the man's face that she had not heard the last remark. She was unable to identify this fair-faced, blue-eyed, gentle-mannered man, now looking questioningly after the retreating Captain, with the profane mate of the forecastle. The easy poise, the careless set of the clothes, the slouch hat, the flowing tie, everything in outward appearance went to fit him for the role of poet, except the hair—"Mike's" hair was always closely cropped.

"There must be some mistake," the old lady finally stammered. "You are not really the mate?"

"Yes'm," he answered, brightly, "that's my present occupation."

"Present occupation," she repeated, bewilderedly, "present occupation." Her face bright-

Digitized by Google

ened. "Then you have not been long in this a—this—business?"

"Yes'm; all I ever had, raised to it."

"But—but—dear me; it is so confusing. I'm sure there is some mistake. Is there another mate on the boat?"

"Yes'm the second mate; I'm the first mate."

"Oh," she exclaimed with a sigh of relief, "that explains it all. It is the second mate I wish to see."

"Yes'm; I'll tell him when he comes on watch."

With that the dapper little mate bowed to the mother, threw a lingering glance at the daughter, and withdrew to learn of the Captain "what kind of a job" was being "put up" on him.

"Mamma," the daughter exclaimed, when Grady was out of hearing, "that was the mate—I'm sure it was."

"No it wasn't, Adelaide—I mean it wasn't the mate I wanted to see. He said himself it was the second mate."

"He said there was a second mate," the daughter persisted, "but I'm sure this is the one who—who—used the strong language. I know that was the same hat—we couldn't see his face down there on account of the broad brim—such a fine face; and what beautiful eyes!"

"Adelaide, I'm astonished! You should not allow carnal thoughts to intrude upon the spiritual."

"Well, I don't care," murmured the submissive

Digitized by Google

daughter in mild protest, "I'm sure that's the man—I just couldn't be mistaken in that hat."

There being no one at hand to settle the matter, the question was dropped for the time, and the two ladies interested themselves in other things. When the whistle blew for Bayou Sara the mother and daughter again seated themselves by the forward rail on the boiler deck, whence they commanded a view of all that took place on the forecastle. Ingram, whom Mrs. Semperfield had meantime rebuked for sending to her the wrong mate, stood a few paces off, pretending an interest in the conversation of some planters from Black River, but in reality awaiting developments below. Grady soon appeared among his men, and all was in readiness for the landing.

"It is the same one, mamma," the Captain heard the daughter say to her mother in a low tone. "I can tell by that hat."

"It does look like the same hat," grudgingly admitted the mother. "Perhaps the second mate put it on by mistake."

"But, mamma, it's the same voice, and—and he has the same eyes," she added, when Grady looked up.

"Well, he hasn't blasphemed, daughter; that's the best evidence."

The boat swung into the landing with the unsuspecting Grady undergoing a probation that meant more to him than he knew. He had taken a position well forward on the starboard side,

Digitized by Google

where he could command a view of the forecastle, and also of the landing. In his right hand was a small pen-knife, with which he was splitting the pecans he from time to time drew from the side pocket of his sack coat. But for the fact that he had been early re-christened "Mike," this habit of eating nuts while on duty would undoubtedly have won for him the sobriquet of "Pecan Grady," for it was rare that one saw him when his hands were not otherwise occupied that he was not splitting the thin shells with his knife and extracting the delicious meats. The habit seemed to take the place of smoking with other men.

A stiff breeze was blowing off shore as the boat came into Bayou Sara, and Lewison, for the moment too much occupied with the ladies in the pilot-house, ran above the roadway. It was then a question of flanking in on a headline, or of backing out into the river and coming in again. Grady's men were on the extended stage, line in hand, ready to jump the moment the shore came within reach.

Away they went at the sharp command of the mate, dragging the heavy line toward a post a hundred feet distant. The wind was already driving the boat out into the river, and Grady's impelling "move lively, men, move lively; pick it up, pick it up; don't—be—all—day—about it," stimulated the men to their utmost.

To lay a headline under such circumstances is next to impossible, but Mike would have accom-

Digitized by Google

plished the feat had not a clumsy fellow fouled the line as he paid it out over the bow. The men ashore, ignorant of the trouble aboard, when they felt the rope slipping from them, pulled the harder, thus making it impossible to free it before the boat had drifted so far out into the river that she had to make a new landing. When Grady, already wrought to the highest pitch of nervous tension realized that the mistake of the pilot—which few would notice—had passed on to him through the carelessness of a stupid roustabout, he burst out with:

"——! ——, ——!!" ——!! —— ——, ——, ——!!!"

"You were right, daughter," Mrs. Semperfield said, taking her fingers from her ears when the storm had passed, "it is the same mate."

Ingram had been obliged to turn his back, lest the horrified ladies should see the expression on his face; while as for poor Grady, when order had been restored on deck, and he bethought himself of his auditors, he cast one appealing look at the dazed daughter and the amazed mother, and retreated back on the starboard guard out of reach of their reproving eyes.

"Captain," Mrs. Semperfield cried, calling that officer to her, "that is the most blasphemous language that ever fell from the lips of man."

"Yes, Grady is something of an artist in his line."

"Captain! Don't you dare to apologize for

Digitized by Google

him." She raised her hands and let them fall helplessly in her lap, and shook her head slowly from side to side. Then she burst out, "Oh, it is dreadful!—dreadful!—dreadful!—and he such a fine looking young man. But the Scriptures tell us that Satan ever assumes a fair form."

"Then you'll have no fear of me," he ventured.

"How can you treat such a serious matter with levity!" She frowned a reproof through her gold-bowed spectacles.

"But, mamma," the daughter interposed, "it must be very provoking to have a stupid fellow mix up the ropes."

"Adelaide! Why, child, I'm astonished to think a girl of your religious training should offer excuses for such awful blasphemy."

The daughter took the rebuke in silence, and turned her attention to matters on the forecastle, while the mother and Ingram engaged in an animated discussion of the relative merits of early religious training.

Grady, for a half hour after leaving Bayou Sara, was occupied with unloading a coal flat; but when the fuel had been put in the bunkers, he responded to the Captain's summons, and presented himself a second time before Mrs. Semperfield and her daughter. If he had the slightest idea of what was in store for him his face bore no evidence, for his countenance was as guileless as a child's.

"Mr.— Mr.—" the old lady stammered.

Digitized by Google

"Mr. Grady," the daughter prompted. The Captain had discreetly withdrawn far enough to be out of the range of conversation, yet he could hear what was said.

"Yes, Grady," the mother repeated, "thank you, Adelaide. Mr. Grady, you were the man I wished to speak to last night."

"Perhaps," he assented, tentatively, "I didn't know."

"Be seated, Mr.—Mr. Grady." She pointed to a chair at her side.

"Mike" withdrew the chair to a respectful distance, and let himself down timidly into it. Always somewhat diffident in the presence of strangers, he was particularly so in the presence of ladies. In fact, among his fellow officers he had borne the reputation of a woman-hater, and he and the Captain were often referred to as the "two old bachelors," though he was but thirty.

Mrs. Semperfield and her daughter were seated next to the railing, so that when the mate took the chair offered him, his back was toward the cabin, and he did not see the half-dozen mischievous brother officers stroll out on the boiler deck, in response to a hint from the Captain.

"Mr. Grady," began Mrs. Semperfield, beaming benevolently upon him through the upper lenses of her spectacles, "you had a mother?"

"I don't remember her—she died shortly after I was born."

Digitized by Google

"Ah, that explains it." She heaved a sigh of relief. "I thought it very strange that a mother could have raised such a sinner."

"Why, mamma," the daughter expostulated, and cast an apprehensive glance at the mate; but he still retained his awaiting-orders attitude.

"Adelaide, please do not interrupt me when I am talking on such a serious subject to a gentleman, or—I should say to a mate."

This time Grady winced. He quaked before that gentle-featured mother; but he found sympathy in the eyes of the daughter. He all but held his breath while awaiting the next words, and was much relieved when the old lady continued in the mildest of tones:

"If you had had a mother, young man, you never would have fallen into such wicked ways. It is woman, the last at the Cross and first at the Tomb, who alone can guide the steps of the erring child into the straight and narrow way. Had you no religious instruction at all? Had you no father?"

"Yes'm; but he ought to have died 'stead of my mother."

"Shocking! Shocking!" She leaned back in her chair in a helpless way, looking first at the mate, then at the daughter, and then back at the mate. Grady's manhood had been so aroused by the sudden recollection of the brutal father who had made his early life miserable that he had been betrayed into the blunt words.

Digitized by Google

"And you had no religious instruction at all?" she inquired.

"Yes, oh, yes; my aunt taught me the catechism, and made me go to Sunday school when I wanted to go fishing.

"Fishing on the Sabbath! You don't mean to say you would go fishing on the Lord's Day?"

There was something soothing and restful in the old lady's voice and manner. One could not resent her meddlesome inquisitiveness, nor take offense at her freely expressed censure. Grady's feeling toward the mother was one of amusement, but a deeper sense had been touched by the sympathetic eyes of the daughter. Between the two he gradually lost his self-consciousness, and did not notice the growing audience behind him.

"Why, yes," he answered in his quiet way, "I reckon every boy wants to go fishing on Sunday —I'd be afraid of a boy that didn't."

"Oh, I'm so glad my child was a girl," the horrified woman exclaimed. "What should I have done with a boy who wanted to go fishing on the Sabbath?"

"Let him go," said Grady, "unless you wanted to raise a liar and a hypocrite. Now, I went to Sunday school first, and then went fishing. There was Ted Williams, and the Dover boys, and Jimmy Deal; they used to cut the Sunday school altogether, and then lie to their folks about it. That wasn't my style; I told the truth and took

Digitized by Google

my licking every Sunday night—that is, when my father was sober."

These reminiscences caused the bashful man to forget himself, and he turned from the horrified mother to the sympathetic daughter, whose mild eyes seemed to be saying, "Poor little fellow, poor little fellow." He felt such a grateful, friendly feeling toward her.

All three were unmindful of eavesdroppers, as well as of the striking scenery the boat was passing. Morgan's Bend was just below, and they were now abreast of Tunica Island, which lay in the muddy water like a great cucumber in a sandy garden.

"Did you grow up like that?" the mother inquired, when she had somewhat recovered from the shock of Grady's frank confession. "Did you always go fishing on the Sabbath?"

"No'm; not always. Sometimes the weather was too bad; and sometimes, you know, the fish won't bite—then we generally played ball in the old cotton shed."

This brazen recital and shameless defense of youthful depravity had gone too far, and the good lady roused herself to duty. Resting her mild but earnest eyes upon his guileless face, she inquired:

"Do you know that your Redeemer liveth?"

"I—er—excuse me, ma'm; it's been so long since I saw a catechism, I've forgotten the answer to that question."

Digitized by Google

"But you believe in God?"

"Yes—Oh, yes."

"And you believe in a hereafter?"

"Y-e-s—at least I hope there's one."

"And that God is the Father of all?"

"I reckon that goes with the rest."

"And all men are brothers?"

"Hold on, now; does that include niggers?"

"Most assuredly; are not they the children of God?"

"Some of them—perhaps—some of the good ones; but I think most of them were made by the other fellow."

"Oh, but, my dear young man, you must not discriminate between the children of our Heavenly Father. You wouldn't exclude any white men, would you?"

"Oh, yes I would—some of them."

"Then what would become of you?"

"Why, mamma—"

"Adelaide, please do not interrupt me." She had assumed a severity of tone strangely at variance with her mild features. "I ask, sir, what would become of you if sinners were excluded from fellowship with God?"

This sudden return to personalities confused the mate, who had been so much at ease that he had carried himself lightly, and he floundered pitifully—to the great amusement of his listening friends grouped within hearing on the boiler deck.

"I—I—I reckon I'll have to give it up." He

Digitized by Google

looked helplessly from one to the other of the two ladies.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Grady,"—there was a world of kindliness, gentleness, persuasiveness, in her voice—"we are all sinners; but the Heavenly Father in His infinite mercy has provided a way of redemption for erring mortals, by means of which we may all hope to enter the Kingdom, if we will believe on Him and forsake our sinful ways. This grace extends to all—even to blasphemers."

A light burst upon Grady. All this talk had been merely for the purpose of leading up to his profanity. Ministers and others of the piously inclined had often taken him to task for this weakness, but no one had ever before come at him in such a roundabout way.

"Oh, I see," he cried, his eyes lighting with a mischievous twinkle. "That's the nigger in the wood pile, eh? Why didn't you say that in the first place—not that I should have agreed to swear off, but we needn't have wasted so much time beating about the bush. I suppose I do let a cuss word drop once in a while, but I've pretty nearly cured myself of the habit." He was looking at the daughter, and did not see the amazed look on the mother's face, but ran on: "Now, when I first began mating, I swore a good deal—you have to do that with niggers till you get a reputation, else they won't respect you—but the ladies sitting up here on the boiler deck didn't

Digitized by Google

just like it, you know, so I quit. I never swear now unless I get in a tight place, and have to have quick results. You see, when you're driving mules or niggers, and get in a tight place, there's nothing 'll make the wheels go round like some real, plain, old-fashioned English. You haven't heard me swear on this trip, have you?—'cept when that fool nigger fouled the line at Bayou Sara. I may have said something then. Did I?"

"Well," the young lady answered, smiling archly, "I think it must have been a pretty tight place."

They both laughed. It was surprising how much that laugh put them at ease, and how confidently he ran on:

"Well, now, honestly, I suppose the boys here on the boat would guy the life out of me if they knew how hard I have tried to swear off, but you see I've been at it so long, and it comes so natural-like, that sometimes I really don't know when I am swearing. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do"—he took a small handful of pecans from his pocket, and held them out to the girl—"you take these nuts, and every time you hear me swear, just drop one down on the forecastle—I'll know what that means. Will you do it?"

The strange request embarrassed the girl; but his earnest manner, together with his evident sincerity, appealed so strongly to her that after a moment's hesitation, she held out her hand for the nuts. Mrs. Semperfield, however, was not so

Digitized by Google

easily appeased. To her, sin was a disease of the soul, a disease that could be removed only by the great Physician.

"Trust not in your own strength," she mildly reproved, regaining his attention. "The best of us are but weak, frail mortals; and without divine assistance our feet stray into the paths of unrighteousness. As the poet says, we are as little children in the dark crying for the light. I have something here"—drawing from the black silk bag in her lap a bundle of papers, which she fumbled for a few moments. "Yes, here it is. I want you to read this tract carefully, prayerfully, and then follow its advice. I knew Dr. Spurling, the author, when I was a little girl. He had been a very wicked man in his youth, but was converted and admitted to the ministry, where he has been the means of bringing many other sinners to Christ."

Grady read the title of the tract, "Cast your burdens on the Lord."

"I don't just like that," he said quite earnestly. "I think every man should carry his own load."

"My dear Mr. Grady, the burden is too great for such frail mortals as we are. It is only with the help of the Lord that we can hope to bear it."

Further discussion was cut off by the pilot's blowing for Raccourci Landing. Grady jammed the tract into the pocket from which he had taken the pecans, and hastily rose to go below, admonishing the daughter, as he took his leave, not to

Digitized by Google

forget him if he should forget himself, and thanking the mother for her kindly interest.

The ordinary freight went ashore without trouble, though once or twice Grady came so near to "blaspheming" that he would not have been surprised to hear a pecan drop at his feet. When, however, it came to moving the big cast-iron kettle that was to go ashore, knowing ones detected the small cloud that portended a storm. Not that the kettle was so heavy, for it did not weigh, probably, more than seven hundred pounds, but its size and shape offered the men no place to take hold. After some delay the unwieldly thing was got upon a strong chain-barrow, and eight lusty men seized the handles to carry it ashore.

But whether the handles of the barrow were too short, or the men on one side did not hold high enough, or what not, as the four men in front stepped upon the stage, the kettle lurched to starboard, and, in spite of the frantic efforts of those behind to stop it, toppled over, struck the edge of the guard, and bounded into the water near the shore.

Grady, who considered a moment lost at a landing a reflection upon his skill as a mate, had already been chafing at the delay and the inevitable explosion followed. But instead of the solitary pecan from the timid hand of Miss Semperfield, there came down a perfect shower of nuts from the half dozen mischievous officers gathered on the boiler deck.

Digitized by Google

He did not humor them by looking; nor did they hear any more profanity while the kettle was being fished out of the water; but the carpenter, who at the time was standing near the mate on the forecastle, afterward declared that some of the muttered oaths would have burned their way through asbestos a foot thick.

Digitized by Google

Chapter VI.

THE CAPTAIN'S FIGHT FOR LIBERTY

On the trip down, Miss Heath came aboard at Daphne to return to school at the Convent. Sidney Drake had ridden down from Penelope plantation to see her off, but there was a lack of cordiality between him and Miss Sally that caught the Captain's attention, and caused him to question his young friend.

"Just can't make it out, nohow, Captain," he said ruefully, in answer to the latter's questions. "She's that quiet you'd think she was sick; and she don't seem to be interested in anything I propose."

"And Mollison?" the Captain inquired.

"He's been down two or three times, but she treats him the same way. I'm feeling mighty bad about it, Captain. If there's anything you can do for me, I know you'll do it, won't you?"

"Depend upon me, Sidney. Just leave the cards and whiskey alone and you'll come out all right."

Ingram, too, was struck by Miss Sally's changed manner after she had been on the boat a little while. He could not complain of a lack of interest in things; indeed, she seemed to take too much interest in himself. He had so much

Digitized by Google

trouble the trip before to put her out of his thoughts that he now tried to avoid her as much as possible. This, however, availed him little, for the more he tried to shun her society, the more she sought his. Had it not been for the presence of Mrs. Semperfield and her daughter he would have been in sore straits. Miss Sally thought the mother the best joke in the world, and took unbounded delight in drawing the good woman into religious discussions. She accepted the tracts with demure deference—and laughed immoderately when the old lady went to her trunk for more.

"You won't care, will you?" she said to the daughter. "I'm not laughing at her, you know—she's just the dearest dear—but it's so funny to be so religious—she ought to be in the Convent."

Miss Sally thought Adelaide charming; and doubtless the daughter's helplessness excited her sympathy, for they had not been together twenty-four hours before there had developed an intimacy that boded ill for Mrs. Semperfield's supremacy. Adelaide had all her life been at her mother's beck and call, and had exercised her own judgment so little that she might almost be said to have none; whereas Miss Sally had had her own way so much that she seemed to the docile girl from the North to be the very spirit of disobedience, a spirit that shocked, yet fascinated her.

Adelaide was one of the simple-hearted girls of whom sensible men say: "She would make a

Digitized by Google

splendid wife"—yet allow to die an old maid. Miss Sally, on the other hand, was one of whom the same men would say: "She will lead some poor fellow a life"—and straightway propose marriage to her.

But it is not likely that any such thoughts now entered the girls' heads; they felt the pleasure of the companionship that comes of the mingling of opposite traits of character and common sympathy. Miss Sally took delight in breaking down the artificial and unnatural barriers that the over-pious mother had put around the too submissive daughter; while Adelaide found a renewed zest in life through catching all unconsciously some of the ways and ideas of her new friend.

Mrs. Semperfield, was too preoccupied in her efforts to convert and regenerate the crew of the Amaryllis, to note the transformation going on in her daughter. She had declared it to be her intention to ride up and down the river till the last one of the officers had been brought within the fold; and, since it cost less to travel on the boat than to live at an ordinary hotel, there were grave fears on the part of the men that she might carry out her purpose. They for the most part treated her as a joke, but her inexhaustible stock of good nature overlapped her supply of tracts, and bore her with unruffled temper through many questionable experiences with the prank-playing officers, and in the end made her, in spite of the inquisitive meddlesomeness, a general favorite.

Digitized by Google

"If that girl," Wedgwood said to Disbrow, meaning Adelaide, "could be separated from her mother a little while, she would amount to something. I rather like her; she's got good stuff in her."

"Yes," the old clerk assented, "but I think it would be an improvement if she had a little of Miss Sally's ginger."

"Ginger," the engineer repeated, "yes, that's what she wants, ginger. Notice her figure, and her air of repose; do you know, that's restful to nervous people like me. Her features, too, would be good enough if it wasn't for her complexion—due in part to indigestion, but more to lack of appreciation. What she needs is some man to love her. And it's a wonder to me they don't. She is educated, and she's witty—once you get her out of her mother's shadow. It's enough to make any girl look sallow to be an old maid—pardon the use of the word, I'm using it to state a fact, and not to cast opprobrium—and it's a great incentive to old-maidenhood to have such a mother."

To Miss Sally the submissive nature of Adelaide was not only lovable, but it furnished an irresistible temptation to foment rebellion in the mind of her new friend. It thus happened that while the pious mother was bending all her efforts to Christianize Miss Sally, that capricious and wilful daughter of the South was doing her utmost to paganize her daughter.

"Captain Ingram," Miss Sally said, when the

Digitized by Google

boat was but a few miles above the Convent, and he had asked her if she were ready to go ashore, "I'm going down to the City with you."

"Oh, and come back to the Convent by train, eh?"

"No, I've changed my mind; I'm not going to school any more."

Ingram, his mind dwelling on Sidney's words, and the girl's conduct on the way down, made no attempt to dissuade her. Instead, he received the declaration with a shrug, and sent word to the pilot not to land at the Convent.

One of the first persons to board the boat when she landed at New Orleans was Ingram's father, Jeremiah Ingram. The old man, true to his life-long passion for boating, never missed an opportunity of boarding the Amaryllis as soon as he knew she was in port; and this time he was on the wharf, impatiently awaiting her arrival.

"Davy," the father exclaimed, grasping his son's hand as the latter met him at the head of the stairs, "you're in for it now."

The younger man did not betray any emotion, nor was it necessary to ask the meaning of his father's words. He had felt the impending disaster the whole trip long; this was merely confirmation. The two men had arrived at that time of life when the relation of child to parent changes to that of the compassion of manhood in its early prime for age in its late decline. When the father had somewhat recovered his breath he drew from

Digitized by Google

2616884

his pocket a newspaper, which he fussily opened to the River Column and handed to his son. There, immediately below the advertisement of the Amaryllis, and duplicating it except for names, David read: "The regular weekly packet Steamer Whistler, for Monroe and all way landings on Ouachita and Black rivers, Joseph Steller, Master; George Randall, clerk; will leave as above, Wednesday evening at five o'clock."

A silence followed. The two men had walked to the guard outside of the cabin, where they were less likely to be interrupted. The older man sat on the railing, with his back against a stanchion, while the younger leaned against the bulkhead. The father was anxiously watching the son's face; the son looked up the long line of boats at the wharf to where the new rival lay. The Whistler was of about the same speed and carrying capacity as the Amaryllis, but she was not quite so neat in appearance, nor so economical in fuel—the superlative qualities of a good boat. She had been built for the Red River trade; but having bankrupted her owner, had been sold for debt, and had fallen into the hands of the rich boatstoreman, who proposed to use her to punish his enemies—that is, the independent owners of boats who would not buy supplies of him.

Neither of the men spoke for some time. Each knew what a steamboat "fight" meant, especially

Digitized by Google

a fight with such an antagonist as Henri Mollison, who could afford to lose many times the fortune of David Ingram without feeling it. They knew that their friends would remain faithful, so far as the boat's patronage was concerned, but it would be necessary to meet Mollison's cut in rates; and they knew the old Frenchman would cut and cut till he reached the very marrow. Business for the past few seasons had been fair, allowing a small profit from careful management, and out of this small profit enough had been squeezed to pay for the boat. But aside from that Ingram's capital consisted of one trip's earnings. A rate war, therefore, meant a running into debt, which, if nothing occurred to turn their rich opponent from his purpose, would result in the loss of the Amaryllis.

There was one alternative—surrender. It was the thought of that word that kept the father's eyes on the son's face, and held him almost breathless till he should declare himself. When he could no longer stand the suspense he asked in tremulous tones:

"Which is it to be, Davy—fight or—or—"

While he was struggling to drag out the hated word "surrender," they were approached by Mollison's confidential man, Louis Granville.

"Pardon me if I intrude, gentlemen," he said in his soft voice, and going direct to the point, "I have come to see if we cannot fix up this little difference."

Digitized by Google

It was not necessary to be more specific as to the difference that needed fixing. Neither of the Ingrams made answer, however, but waited for him to continue, the father still intent upon the son's face, as though he would anticipate his answer.

"You see," the soft-voiced man went on in passionless tones, "Mr. Mollison don't want to hurt you folks—and he's always been against rate-cutting and all that sort of thing; but he thinks it's no more than right that all the Ouachita boats should trade with him. You see yourselves how it is."

Neither of the men addressed offered any comment. It was indeed a very plain case. Presently the peace emissary continued:

"You see, there is a fellow in the Vicksburg trade—not necessary to mention names—that the old man wants to settle with; and if you'll just say the word he'll pull the Whistler out of the Ouachita and send her to Vicksburg."

"You know John Leeds?" There was a rising inflection in David's voice.

"Yes," Granville answered, his soft voice betraying a note of harshness, "and I know he is a blind pilot and keeps a little picayune boatstore; what of it?"

"Why, just this of it" — David straightened himself squarely on his feet and spoke with a deliberation that made each word stand out with menacing distinctness and caused his father to

Digitized by Google

hold his breath—"you may tell Henri Mollison for me that so long as John Leeds is in business I know where to buy my supplies."

"Davy," the father cried, but he was interrupted by the emissary, who had resumed his soft, wheedling tone.

"Oh, come now, Captain; this sentiment is all right in its place and we honor you for it, but——"

"It is useless to discuss the matter," David said, with an impatient wave of the hand.

"That is your answer, then?" The eyes of the little man had begun to kindle, and there was more than a suspicion of a sneer on his handsome face.

"That is my answer to him. My answer to you is that if you ever come aboard this boat again with a blackmailing proposition, I'll throw you in the river.'

"But, Captain——"

"Go, man, before it's too late."

The intense feeling betrayed by the tone, and the fire that blazed up in the deep-set eyes, cut short the disdainful smile on Granville's face; and he contented himself with saying, as he backed away out of reach of the long arms:

"As you please, Captain"—he bowed low in mock deference. "When you have had enough you can come to us. Good day."

"Davy, Davy boy," the father cried, in a voice suffused with emotion, and his eyes swimming with tears as he grasped his son's hand, "that isn't

Digitized by Google

business, but, by the Eternal, it's manhood. It's worth losing ten steamboats to hear that."

They were still discussing the incident when a middle-aged man, holding the hand of a little girl, approached.

"Ah, here they are now, father," David cried cheerily at sight of them. "Howdy, John? And how is Mistress Dorothy this morning?"

He bent down and gathered the child in his arms for an embrace and a kiss, and then stood her on the railing, where, as he held her from falling, she began to chatter.

"Oh, Uncle Captain," she cried in a thin, childish treble, "what *do* you think? Butter's gone up another cent, and hams are thirteen and a half, and flour is eight dollars; but dried apples are down and so are peaches—I heard Mr. Harris tell papa this morning."

"You don't tell me," David sighed, trying to suppress a smile. "This is the worst news yet. We'll have to make the passengers use apple sauce on their bread, won't we?"

"Yes, and lard——"

"Dorothy," the father broke in, "can't you talk about anything but boatstores?"

"Now, please don't interrupt a lady and gentleman," Ingram protested with a gravity in keeping with that of the child. Then turning to her he asked in all seriousness, "How about prunes, Dorothy? You know we couldn't run a steamboat without dried prunes. And cheese—

Digitized by Google

is cheese going up or down? You know it won't keep still long. Mortimer says the last that came from your store was so alive that it jumped overboard."

"Oh, what a fib! I don't believe a word of it, Uncle Captain; I'm going to ask Mr. Mortimer myself. Anyway—Oh, there's Miss Sally!" she cried, as that young lady and Adelaide came out of the cabin, and ran to meet her.

David looked wistfully after the quaint little figure as the two young ladies led her away between them. Dorothy was all that remained to John Leeds of his family. By a strange chance she had been left at home with a relative when the mother and the other two children had gone with the father on the ill-fated Hesper. Leeds was on watch when the fire broke out, and he stood at his post till overcome by the heat and smoke, which cost him his sight. His wife and children had been put in a lifeboat with other passengers, but by some mischance the boat capsized and all were drowned.

When the father had been discharged from the hospital he had embarked in a small way in the steamboat supply business. But though personally popular, and enjoying the sympathy of the whole steamboat fraternity, many would-be customers were deterred from trading with him because of the fear of Mollison. Still, he had been able to conduct his little enterprise on a profitable basis. Ingram had from the beginning been

Digitized by Google

Leeds' champion, and had been so zealous that the old Frenchman had not been able to run his small competitor out of business.

Dorothy had been the inseparable companion of her father, often taking the place of Pete, the little darkey whose duty it was to attend the blind man, and guiding his steps. She invariably begged this privilege when he went among the steamboats, where she was a general favorite of the officers. So close had been the child's association with grown people, and so constant her attendance at the store, that instead of speaking the language of childhood and entertaining childish ideas she had acquired the business terms of her associates. It would have sounded droll enough, had it not been so pathetic, to hear her discuss the merits of various soaps, or quote prices of hams and coffee with all the gravity of a veteran merchant.

Leeds' more intimate friends had urged him to keep the child among children of her own age, and indeed he had tried; but she had grieved so much over the separation that in the end he had thought it best to let the little thing have her way.

"Davy," the blind pilot began, when Dorothy had disappeared in the cabin with Miss Sally and Adelaide, "you have seen what Henri Mollison has done, and you know what it's for. Now, it would be just like your foolhardiness to fight him. Don't do it. Don't think you have to stand by me. I appreciate what you've done for me, but I

Digitized by Google

won't thank you for this. It ain't right. Give Mollison your order this trip—do, now; there's a good fellow; do it for my sake." The pilot had seized Ingram's hand and turned his pleading face to him. "If you don't," he added, shaking his head, "he'll get you sure."

"John, there's just one condition on which I'll go to him."

"What's that?"

"I'll take my trade to Mollison just as soon as you can stand watch in the pilot-house—and not one minute before."

"Oh, come, now, Davy——"

"Not another word, John. I've just promised to throw Granville into the river if he ever comes here again, and if you don't mind I'll chuck you in, too. Why, man, if old Mollison can scare me he can scare any man on the river; and if I should surrender, what'll become of the rest of your customers?"

"But, Davy——"

"Come about, John; you're 'way out of the channel. Father, take him in hand."

Wednesday morning Gore and Gerry, Mollison's agents for the Whistler, announced that they would receive freight at one-fifth off card rates, and the cut was immediately met by Ingram. At five o'clock, the hour of departure, it was found that the Amaryllis had four-fifths of the freight, and nearly all the passengers, but at a rate that all but eliminated profits. Steller, the

Digitized by Google

captain of the Whistler, purposely delayed departure till Ingram had got underway in order that he might have the privilege, dear to small-minded boatmen, of passing him.

But there was no race. The Amaryllis was drawing nine feet, while the Whistler was almost light, which allowed the latter to lead her opponent before they got to Carrollton. Ingram made no attempt to speed his boat when the Whistler came up, as, indeed, it would have been useless with such a disparity in cargoes, but stood on the guards and waved a salute to Steller as he went by, and took good-naturedly the chaffing of his own passengers.

The Whistler, thus outrunning the Amaryllis, and having so much less freight to handle, was able to turn back from Monroe several hours ahead, which gave her the first call at the landings going down, and enabled her to pick up considerable cotton from such planters as remained neutral. But by far the greater number of planters stood by Ingram. They expected him to meet Steller's rates; but, that done, they held their cotton for him.

Colonel Heath and Sidney made it a personal matter, and rode up and down the river on horseback, pledging their friends to support the young captain who was fighting for independence. Basel Mollison, with a view no doubt to show disinterestedness, divided his cotton between the two boats, and was so affable, not to say cordial, when

Digitized by Google

he met Ingram that the latter was for a time persuaded that the son had had nothing to do with the fight made by the father.

Here, then, was the situation: At the very height of the season, when, if ever, Ingram should have been making his profit on the year's business, he found himself engaged in a ruinous rate war with a rich and unscrupulous opponent. And, as though the conditions were not already hard enough, Mollison, according to newspaper report, had within a week "cleaned up" a half-million dollars on the Cotton Exchange. A half-million dollars! Such a sum would buy a number of boats like the Amaryllis. It would pay the Whistler's expenses if she should carry freight for nothing. But this news did not in the least alter Ingram's course. He had entered the contest with his eyes open; he would stay till the end.

"Davy," the blind pilot began, when the next trip in port he had got the Captain off to one side, "you've done me a good many favors and I'm going to show my appreciation by asking another."

The scarred face, with its sightless eyes, was turned appealingly to Ingram, and the emotion betrayed by his voice indicated that something near his heart was in question. Dorothy had climbed into her "Uncle Captain's" lap, where she snuggled close in his arms, patting his large hands affectionately, but keeping her eyes upon her father's face.

Digitized by Google

"Certainly, John," the Captain responded heartily, and then added, with a meaning inflection, "anything within reason."

"Oh, yes, now; talk about reason," Leeds protested, with assumed severity in his tone. "I've always noticed that the more pig-headed a man is, the more he is apt to appeal to reason. Never mind the reason; I ask you to do me a favor."

"And I've already told you, anything within reason. What do you think of such a man, Dorothy?"

"I think he's the dearest father that ever lived," and she reached over and took one of his hands, which she stroked affectionately, and then hugged to her bosom.

"You see, Davy," the blind man resumed after a pause—he was never too much preoccupied to notice the caresses of his child—"yours was the first order that came into my little establishment, and you not only have been a good customer ever since, but you have brought me many others. I owe the success of the business to you. Now, it's only natural that I should want to reciprocate. In fact, I demand it as a right. You're running in shoal water yourself now, and unless old Mollison should die, or something unforeseen turns up, you're going to get aground. I know enough of your affairs to see that you will soon be borrowing money to keep this boat running; and what I'm after is this: I want you to promise me that the first account you run will be with Leeds' boat-

Digitized by Google

store. Nothing would please me more, Davy"—he leaned toward the Captain and spoke with pleading tones—"than to carry your stores' account during this fight."

Ingram was deeply moved by the man's sincerity, and the pause that followed while he strove to master his emotion caused the child to look up questioningly in his face.

"John," he began, "if your head was as big as your heart——"

"Oh, come, now, Davy; be square. I mean business."

"Pshaw! You don't know as much about business as this child does."

"I understand business, Uncle Captain," she broke in eagerly. "I can tell the price of four kinds of coffee, and side meat, and prunes, and lard, and scrubbing brushes—the ones with the handles—and white sugar—and brown, too—and brooms, and—and I know how much seven times nine are—thirty-six—I mean sixty-three—and Mr. Rogers is going to teach me to add the figures in the big books just as soon as I can reach the top of the page."

The little voice stopped for want of breath, but the big eyes continued to speak for her. Ingram hugged the little thing close in his arms, and his eyes were too moist to let her see them for the moment. Presently, rousing himself, he said with assumed brusqueness:

"No, John: you're the one who is getting

Digitized by Google

into shoal water. Your profession taught you that a boat can't be steered by sentiment. God knows, man, how much I appreciate your offer" —the lump would come into his throat and the moisture would gather in his eyes, but he pulled himself together and continued—"but you haven't learned yet the difference between business and philanthropy. Now, I'm a business man, and I'm running this boat on business principles; just leave the fight to me."

"Great Caesar's ghost!" the pilot ejaculated. "What conceit!"

"Why, see here, John," Ingram continued in a kinder tone, "I am showing how much I appreciate your kindness by making this explanation. It is because I know you mean what you say that I am taking all this trouble to show you how utterly impossible it is for me to accept your offer. If you were as rich as old Mollison, I shouldn't hesitate a minute; but this boat would eat you out of house and home in no time. No, John, I can't do it. I'll borrow money on the credit of the Amaryllis; when that's gone I'm done. Come, Dorothy," he said abruptly, as he rose from his chair, "let's go down to the cookhouse and see what Pierre's doing." And away the two cronies went for the toothsome dainties the clever chef was sure to have for his little visitor.

Gore and Gerry were now soliciting business at one-fourth off card rates; but as Peel and Sterling, Ingram's agents, had orders to meet all cuts

Digitized by Google

of the opposition, this second reduction in rates did not materially affect the relative volume of business of the two boats, though it did wipe out the last vestige of profit. The Amaryllis again went out with a load, while the Whistler was almost light, and the latter came down a second time without getting much cotton. This trip demonstrated beyond question that Ingram's friends would stand by him so far as patronage was concerned; but as the business was now conducted without profit, it was a question as to how long he could stand the strain.

But notwithstanding the dark clouds hovering over the young boatman, portentous of financial disaster, his mind was as free as a child's from foreboding. His was one of those strong natures that are steadied by responsibility. Like the great general in battle, he was calmest when most was at stake. Deliberately and carefully he laid out his plan of action, arranged for obtaining all the money his credit would command, and made an estimate of how long he could stand the losses. If Henri Mollison should call off the fight before that time, well and good; if not—also well and good.

This done, he dismissed the whole matter from his mind, or, rather, he stored it in one of the mental pigeon-holes in which he kept his completed thoughts, and gave his attention to the details of the business with far less concern than was felt by the least of his friends. No one enjoyed more than

Digitized by Google

he the jokes the officers played on each other; no one found more amusement in the proselytizing efforts of Mrs. Semperfield.

But there was one thing that did trouble him somewhat. His thoughts would revert now and again to Miss Sally, and he felt almost as guilty as though he had coveted his friend's wife. What was she to him? Had she not long been engaged to Sidney? And even should Sidney be removed, who was he, with financial ruin staring him in the face, to think of marrying? Out upon such thoughts! And he gave more attention to Mrs. Semperfield and her daughter.

They had been over to Pass Christian to spend a week with an invalid friend from Philadelphia, but were now making another trip on the Amaryllis. This time the supply of tracts was inexhaustible, and there seemed to be no limit to the old lady's zeal. One of her first feats was to entrap Grady into "swearing off swearing," as he put it. There was the usual incredulity manifested on the part of the officers when they heard of it, and for a few days the chaffing and badgering were rather severe.

Wedgwood brought the matter to a focus by mysteriously declaring that: "Whenever you see a man doing something very good, or very bad, you may be sure he's got his eye upon a woman."

"Which one is it?" the second clerk asked. It was at the dinner table, and a few of the officers

Digitized by Google

were dawdling over their dessert and coffee, after Grady had fled their teasing and gone below.

"The old one, of course," interjected the pessimistic second mate, who had come in in time to hear the last remarks.

"They are both over thirty," persisted the second clerk.

"Well, she's five years younger," replied Wedgwood, referring, as they all knew, to the daughter, "than when she first came aboard this boat."

At that moment Adelaide came in from the boiler deck and passed down to the ladies' cabin.

"By Jove, she does look younger," Danforth exclaimed when she had passed out of hearing. "See how she carries herself; and that step — you'd think she was walking on air."

"Didn't I tell you she was a fine girl?" old Mr. Disbrow commented.

"Dogged if she isn't," Danforth admitted. "And I thought her homely as a mud fence the first time I saw her. That beats me."

Presently the young lady in question returned from the ladies' cabin, humming a snatch of song softly to herself as she approached. She smiled at Wedgwood—all the ladies were partial to the old engineer — and nodded pleasantly to the others.

"Blamed if she isn't good-looking!" Danforth exclaimed with still more emphasis when she had passed out of the cabin. "If I wasn't so old, I might take a shine to her myself."

Digitized by Google

"Hear the blase young man," Wedgwood cried. "But say, gentlemen, did you ever notice what a change comes over an old maid when she is in love, or, rather, when she finds some one is in love with her?"

"You shouldn't expect one of my tender years," Danforth interjected, "to be a connoisseur in matters of the heart."

Wedgwood smiled at the irrepressible clerk and turned his attention to Disbrow.

"Honest, now; I'm not joking," he went on with a serious air. "The poet who likened the eyes to the windows of the soul wasn't far off. When the spirit is full of life and hope it shines so brightly through the eyes that the whole face is illuminated, and even plain features become beautiful."

"Pity people couldn't keep on courting, 'stead of marrying,'" said the second mate, sententiously.

"They should marry *and* keep on courting, Dan," Wedgwood responded. "No man ever made a greater mistake than when he stopped courting his wife."

"That explains something that has always bothered me," flashed the second clerk. "It was always a puzzle to me how all the homely women got their husbands—thought it was because love was blind."

Bushnell laughed and old Mr. Disbrow smiled in his quiet way—he enjoyed hearing Dan-

Digitized by Google

forth "carry on" when the fun was not too boisterous.

"Not a bit of it," the old engineer went on, with all the deliberation of lining up a cylinder or setting a poppet valve. "It isn't that the heart is blind, but the mind is stupid. Take, for instance, the case of a homely girl. A young fellow meets her a few times, finds her agreeable—plain people are usually smart——"

"I've often remarked upon your good looks," broke in the irreverent Danforth.

"Oh, shut up a minute!" cried Bushnell. "I want to hear what Socrates has to say—if there's anything he understands better than engines, it's affairs of the heart."

"Yes, go on," Disbrow added. "Never mind these children."

"Well, it's this way," Wedgwood continued, after a sufficient pause to re-establish his dignity, "the homely girl is so pleased at attracting the notice of the young man, and her spirit is so quickened by the prospect of escaping that Siberia of womankind—old maidenhood—that it shows in her manner, in her speech, and, most of all, in her eyes. From dwelling continually in her thoughts upon all that is noble and beautiful in the young man, her own face is finally illumined by love, and the young man, finding that the girl, after all, is not homely, marries her."

"There's where he breaks his molasses jug," laughed Danforth.

Digitized by Google

"On the contrary," rebuked Wedgwood, "that's where he fills his molasses jug; he breaks it when he stops courting—after he is married. When the young husband stops courting, the young wife thinks he doesn't love her, for women attach much importance to small things. She loses interest in life, buries her ideals and sags back into plain-faced wifehood. The husband, when he sees the change that has come over his wife, wonders how he came to marry such a homely woman, and makes facetious remarks about love's being blind and all that sort of cheap wit. Now, if the fool only knew enough to keep up steam, he'd go on courting his wife just as he courted his sweetheart, and so have not only a wife and a sweetheart, but a handsome woman, too — the incomparable trinity of the home."

"Say, Tom," the second clerk mused, turning to the old engineer when he had ceased speaking, and a thoughtful air had come over those at the table, "I'd give a pretty penny to see Mrs. Wedgwood."

It may well be imagined what interest these kindly-natured, gossipy officers took in their captain's affairs. It was inevitable that they should be concerned about his business prospects, for selfish, if for no other, reasons, since his failure would mean a breaking of old ties, a seeking of new berths—they had been together so long that they seemed like one family—with all the uncer-

Digitized by Google

tainties of a steamboatman's life; but in addition to all this they were interested in his personal affairs.

The conduct of Miss Sally, on her return from New Orleans the trip before, had set them all agog. She had dogged the Captain's steps, delayed her meals, when he had been detained by duties outside, that she might be at table with him, stood watch when he did, and took advantage of the many privileges permitted her as pet of the boat to be with him.

Nor was it her attentions to the Captain so much as her disregard of the other officers that marked her conduct. The old spirit of camaraderie was lacking, and where she had been wont to lead in the badinage and in the various innocent escapades she now met coldly the advances of the others. The officers noted also the change in Ingram's manner. Instead of pressing his attentions upon the girl, as he had done when Basel Mollison was aboard, he now tried to avoid her as much as possible.

"I'm afraid trouble is brewing in that quarter," Wedgwood said to Disbrow one afternoon, when Miss Sally followed the Captain out of the cabin forward.

The old clerk nodded assent, but said nothing. He had known David Ingram since childhood; had, indeed, been clerk for many years with old Captain Jerry, and he loved the young man as an

Digitized by Google

own son. He had been much worried over the turn affairs had taken.

"I suppose," the engineer continued, "a rupture with young Drake will mean a duel, or something worse. Mrs. Limbertongue"—he referred to Mrs. Radcliff, who lived across the river from Penelope plantation, Sidney's home, and who was widely known as a gossip—"is aboard, and you may be sure she will give an account of things when she gets home. Oh, I can just hear that story by the time it reaches Sidney Drake."

Again the old clerk nodded his head in silence.

But either the anticipated stories had not reached Sidney by the time the Amaryllis came down, which is incredible, or he did not believe them, for he was still devoting his whole energy to aiding his friend in the contest with Henri Mollison.

On the third trip out with the Whistler there was a cut to one-half card rates. This brought out big cargoes, for many shippers were anxious to take advantage of the cheap freights, but Ingram still retained the bulk of the business. This, however, though having its moral effect, had ceased to be an advantage financially; for, when the rate fell to a point below the cost line, the more freight handled the greater the loss.

This trip exhausted Ingram's small surplus capital and forced him to negotiate a loan of Joseph Mercier, a well-known commission man and

Digitized by Google

cotton broker, with whom both he and his father had had intimate business relations.

As if to accentuate the difference in the financial standing of Ingram and Mollison at this time, the press announced that the rich boatstoreman had decided to enter the coal-carrying business, and had purchased the Hercules, the largest towboat on the river, preparatory to transporting coal from Pittsburg to New Orleans. Such a boat, together with her fleet of barges, would represent an investment of more than a quarter of a million of dollars.

And David Ingram was compelled to borrow money to meet the trip's expenses.

Mercier had agreed to honor Ingram's notes up to two-thirds the value of the Amaryllis, which generous terms were due in part, no doubt, to the admiration the commission man had always entertained for the young commander. When that credit should have been exhausted, Ingram could see nothing ahead—nothing but the red flag of the United States marshal.

Ah, that red flag! How often had it flaunted its sanguinary hue in his face as he passed the Canal street entrance of the Custom House! A trifling thing of itself—merely a bit of red bunting no larger than a hand towel, fastened to a stick too small to beat a dog with, and having pinned at the bottom a slip of paper announcing the name of the boat to be sold, and the time.

To the French Commune that bit of red cloth

Digitized by Google

meant liberty, equality and fraternity; to the modern militant anarchist it stands as the symbol of justice; but to the steamboatman it means the end of all things, the extinction of hope, the death of ambition. For there at the foot of the broad, marble stairs at the entrance of the old Custom House, in the presence of a promiscuous crowd of idlers, the finest boat that entered the port of New Orleans, the very pride of the river, having been seized by the marshal for debt, might fall under the hammer of the auctioneer, as though she were no more than a bargain of second-hand books.

And the marshal! The United States marshal! A few politicians are interested in securing a place for this or that man; the casual reader notes the announcement, as he carelessly scans the morning paper, that Brigham Holdfast has secured a "plum," but the vast public knows and cares as little about the United States marshal as it does of the nighthawk on the jackstaff.

To the stricken and wounded steamboatman, however, vainly striving to meet the competition of subsidized railroads, the federal marshal is the Nemesis of his waking hours and the ogre of his troubled dreams.

Ingram had sometimes wondered how he should feel if he ever should see that little red flag flaunting the name of his dearly beloved boat; but such evil thoughts had seldom lasted longer than the time required to walk a square, or until he had

Digitized by Google

passed the forbidding gray granite walls of the block-long Custom House.

Now, however, that flag began to haunt him. Whenever he saw it swaying from its little staff, projecting from the door-casing at an angle of fifteen degrees, he stopped to read the name of the boat that had brought her owner to grief. He tried to picture in his mind how the name of his own boat would look there. "Amaryllis" was rather long, as steamboat names go, and it seemed to him to be different from the other names; every syllable, every letter, was big with meaning—it would take several pins to hold it to the bottom of the little red flag.

And when he looked up at the great streaming flag that the sailorman hoisted to the top of the Amaryllis' jackstaff every Wednesday morning, he sometimes caught himself speculating as to how many marshal's flags could be made out of the broad red band that ran down the middle. Once he dreamed that he saw the name of the Amaryllis pinned to the bottom of the little flag before the Custom House door, and he awoke with much the same feeling that he had had when the Dauphine burst her boiler, and blew him out of his stateroom into the river.

And yet why the red flag at all? He had but to say a word, and the Whistler would be withdrawn from his trade, and leave him to the enjoyment of a profitable business. John Leeds advised it; John Leeds, the very man whom he

Digitized by Google

was protecting, urged him to patronize Henri Mollison. But to Ingram to yield in one thing was to yield in all things. He must stand free from dictation, or cease all claim to being a man. As between Henri Mollison and the United States marshal, he would welcome the marshal.

In that sense the red flag meant liberty.

Digitized by Google

Chapter VII.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN MISS SALLY WENT TO NEW ORLEANS

Henri Mollison evidently thought that he had set a good pace for the "pig-headed Ingram," for he allowed the rates to stand at one-half. Knowing that every pound of freight was now being carried at a loss, he was not worried by the fact that the Amaryllis went out every Wednesday with full trips, while the Whistler was "flying light." It did hurt his pride somewhat to see Ingram's friends so steadfast, but he consoled himself with the reflection that they would the sooner bankrupt him. Besides, when the fight was ended—and he knew how it would end—there would follow a reckoning with some of the noisy boasters.

The contest, which now had become simply a question of endurance, with such favors and advantages as chance might bring, grew more and more ominous to the officers of the Amaryllis. It had been proposed by Wedgwood and some others in the beginning that a cut in salaries be made to correspond with the reduction in rates.

"I can't have it that way, Tom," Ingram answered, when the old engineer broached the subject as delicately as he could. "I appreciate your

Digitized by Google

offer more than you can guess, for no one enjoys the good will of friends more than I do, but I tell you this is my fight, and you fellows must keep out."

"Your nerve is fine, Captain," the old engineer responded with a shrug, "but I can't approve of your judgment. Perhaps you'll think better of it by and by. Remember, the boys are with you."

Outside friends, when they offered assistance, were met by the same stubborn resistance; indeed, Ingram was almost rude to poor Leeds before the warm-hearted pilot could be made to desist.

"I tell you, John," the Captain vehemently exclaimed, when the pilot had exhausted his patience, "this doesn't concern you at all—it's between Mollison and me. There is something in it that you don't suspect—something that I'm not at liberty to tell you. The fact that I trade with you isn't all. Why, if you went out of business to-morrow, I wouldn't trade with him—I'd see him in hell first!"

That ended the matter so far as discussion was concerned, for Leeds had long since learned that when Ingram resorted to profanity he had settled convictions; but it did not satisfy the blind pilot nor exhaust his resources for doing his friend a kindness. The truth of the matter was, as Ingram had said in the first place, Leeds was not a business man; he was too apt, when in doubt, to trust to his heart instead of to his head. In the present instance, for example, he had seriously entertained

Digitized by Google

the idea of closing his store as a last heroic means of preventing his friend's ruin; but Ingram's emphatic declaration that he would not under any circumstances go to Mollison had shown that that move would be unavailing. Yet he was as determined as before to do something.

Ingram had scarcely less difficulty in declining the money offered by Colonel Heath. The old planter, while by no means rich, had been able to lay by a few thousands of his own, besides what he had added to his ward's fortune, and these savings he freely offered to his young friend. Sidney had no money to offer—for the young man's lack of business talent and his weakness for gaming had added to, rather than diminished, the debt under which his plantation had so long lain—but his services were freely given and as gladly accepted.

But great as were Ingram's financial difficulties at this time, and black as was the future, they sank into insignificance when compared with the new trouble that threatened to overwhelm him. When Miss Sally announced her determination of going on to New Orleans, instead of stopping at the Convent, as had been her first intention, he became fully aware of his enslavement. His mind from that hour was filled with tumultuous thoughts; for no sooner had he experienced the ecstasy of luxuriating in her presence and seeing her growing fondness for him—he could interpret her conduct in no other way—than he realized the

Digitized by Google

hopelessness of it all. He could not betray his friend. Gladly would he have entered the lists against Basel Mollison, or against any other suitor, but not Sidney. Friendship was sacred.

It was this struggle that Wedgwood and Disbrow had noted and commented upon. But hard as it had been for Ingram to resist the temptation thrown in his way, he had finally won the victory over self, and was able, when he arrived at Daphne and delivered his precious charge into the keeping of her friends, to extend a clean hand to Sidney—though backed by a heavy heart.

He had thought that the struggle would be easier after Miss Sally had left the boat. His desperate financial condition claimed attention, and he tried to concentrate his mind upon the details of the business; but, strive as he would, her bewitching smile and laughing eyes ever came between him and his duties. And finally, as if the Evil One himself had entered into a conspiracy against him, when the Amaryllis stopped at Daphne plantation on her way down, the second trip after Miss Sally had returned home, there at the landing stood that self-same young lady, ready to go again to the Crescent City.

"I just had to do some more shopping," she began by way of excuse to the Captain. "Besides, you know, the fare is so low now it's cheaper to ride on the boat than to stay at home. I reckon pretty soon you'll have all the people on Ouachita

Digitized by Google

River riding up and down on the Amaryllis." She ended with a burst of laughter that sent his heart bounding.

"I reckon she's about right, Captain," the colonel added with an indulgent smile, and then more seriously he said, "I hope it isn't going to make my little girl a gadabout."

It was evident that the old man was worried over the conduct of his niece, for there was unwonted emotion when he charged Ingram to see that "no ha'm" came to his "little girl."

Sidney, too, seemed to be laboring under some restraint, for he gazed wistfully into the Captain's eyes when he bade him good-bye. Ingram was struck by the omission of the usual charge to "look after Miss Sally." The young planter had confined his conversation entirely to business and matters relating to the "fight," and was enthusiastic in his assertions that "we are bound to win, Captain; we sure are bound to win." It was Sidney's lightness of spirit and never-failing hopefulness that made him such a favorite.

Ingram, knowing his young friend so well, felt that under the present circumstances some of his cheerfulness was forced; it seemed to lack the usual spontaneity. He longed to speak of his own trouble. He wanted to assure Sidney that under no circumstances would he forget the ties of friendship. But he dared not trust himself upon the subject; he was loath to mention Miss Sally's name. So they parted, each pretending an inter-

Digitized by Google

est in what was now secondary, and both ignoring the thing that had become paramount.

"Captain Ingram," Miss Sally said, the afternoon of the day she came aboard, "what makes you so down in the mouth? You look like you'd lost your last friend."

Ingram had thrown himself disconsolately upon the wooden settee in front of the texas, where for the moment he had abandoned himself to foreboding thoughts. The philosophy that had so long been his staff had at last failed him. He could see nothing but financial disaster to come from his contest with Henri Mollison, and only heart-sickness as the result of his love for Miss Heath. It was hard, indeed, he thought, to be attacked in the head and in the heart at the same time.

The Amaryllis was swinging around bend after bend of the beautiful Ouachita, as she wended her way southward under the watchful eye and skilful hand of Lewison. From time to time the great whistle on the pilot-house sounded a sonorous blast to warn planters below that she was coming, and occasionally—when a particularly sharp point was met—to let possible ascending boats know of her presence and thus avoid an accident. The cotton had already reached the top of the rail on the boiler deck, and Ingram had no doubt she would pick up enough before reaching the mouth of Black River to hide her cabin. But the overwhelming sense of disaster prevented the feeling

Digitized by Google

of pride that otherwise would have arisen from taking into port a big load of cotton. Even the warmth of the slowly descending sun, which had at last beaten back the chilly north wind, failed to penetrate to his heart.

He jerked himself into an upright position and moved to the end of the settee to make room for her before answering.

"I'm not quite as pert as usual, Miss Sally — the fact is, well, I guess I'll have to confess to a fit of the blues."

Had he made such a remark to her a month before, she would have laughed immoderately, as at the best of jokes, but now her face bore a look of deep concern. As she seated herself beside him on the settee he was more than ever impressed by the change that had come over her, both in manner and in looks. She was dressed more simply than had been her wont, though there was still the fluffy effect that makes women so attractive to strong men, and she had the inevitable flower in her hair —he often wondered how she managed to command nature's choicest tribute, no matter what the season—but the boisterousness of youth had merged into the dignity of maturity. The erstwhile roguish, laughing face had a sympathetic expression that was new to him. But all these changes only added to her beauty and lovableness —and increased his misery.

"Captain," she began presently, after thoughtfully studying his face, "what makes you always

Digitized by Google

treat me like I was a child—just something to amuse folks?"

He made no answer. His eyes were fascinated by her serious face.

"I am a woman," she continued, ignoring his silence and drawing her slight figure up as though she would add an inch. "I'm a woman grown, a sure 'nough woman; and I want to talk to you as a woman."

Still he offered no comment, but sat drinking in the beauty of her face.

"I reckon you are not making much money these days."

This unexpected statement seemed to break the spell, for he roused himself, and the faintest of smiles overspread his homely face.

"Uncle says you must be losing money every trip now," she persisted.

"You mustn't believe everything you hear," he answered, making a feeble attempt at bantering.

"There you go," she cried petulantly. "You just want to treat me like a child. Answer my question, sir," and she stamped her foot.

It was as though the mouse had bid the lion to stand—but the lion obeyed.

"Well, yes," he said thoughtfully. "The fact is, Miss Sally, the colonel is not far wrong." He was still smiling at her imperious earnestness.

"How much money have you to spend in this fight?"

He was taken completely aback. Many friends

Digitized by Google

had proffered assistance, but none had dared to put that blunt question. His first impluse was to put it aside, as had been his wont when she took liberties with him, but the pleading look in the sympathetic eyes restrained him and he answered:

"I haven't any, Miss Sally—only what I can borrow on the credit of this boat; when that's used up—I'm done."

The last words were spoken in such despondency that for a few moments she remained silent, beating the toe of her little shoe on the deck.

"Captain Ingram, you have always been a good friend to me; will you do me a favor?"

"You know I will, if I can; what is it?"

"Promise me."

"No; tell me first what it is."

This was not the teasing manner in which she usually sought favors; it was the seriousness of one carrying the weight of great responsibilities. He had always thought her so handsome when mischief was playing in her dark eyes, but now they burned with a depth of feeling that made them irresistible, and had she persisted in her demand he would have promised anything.

"I want you to take this money and beat Henri Mollison."

She handed him a certificate of deposit in the Citizens' Bank of New Orleans, carefully endorsed in his favor. When his eye caught the amount he was startled into an exclamation, for

Digitized by Google

he had no idea that she could command such a sum. The colonel had never given a hint as to the amount of her fortune beyond saying that it was enough to keep her from want. The whole incident was so unexpected that for a moment he was speechless; presently, recovering himself, he said, and with deep feeling:

"Miss Sally, you know that I am your friend; I am sure you do. I think more of you—I mean my regard for you—Pshaw! You've got me rattled. Don't look at me in that way—I can't think."

They gazed into each other's eyes in silence. He felt impelled to take her in his arms, and strain her to his hungry heart. Her eyes dared him. He hesitated—wavered; but rousing himself by a supreme effort, he continued in a more natural tone of voice though without looking at her while he spoke:

"You know there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, consistent with honor; but I—I can't do this. You see I have a right to spend my own money in this fight, but I couldn't spend what belonged to some one else. If the price of this boat isn't enough to carry me through, no amount my friends could spare would avail—I never could discharge such a debt as you would put me under, even if I won."

"But, Captain, I don't mean to lend it; I want to give it to you. It's mine; I can spend it as I please, and nothing would do me so much good

Digitized by Google

as to see you beat that old Mollison. Won't you please take it?"

She laid her hand on his arm while speaking, and had leaned forward till her sweet, earnest face was close to his. Again came the impulse to take her in his arms, and silence her lips with kisses. He looked deep into the pleading eyes and saw—but the thought of Sidney came, and he put the temptation from him.

"My dear girl," he urged in as firm a tone as he could command, "can't you see how preposterous your plan is? Why, child, what would the Colonel say? What would people think?"

"Uncle will agree to anything I say. As for the others, who cares what they think?" She snapped her fingers to show her contempt for Mrs. Grundy.

"What makes you hate Henri Mollison so?" he asked, thinking to divert her from the idea by changing the subject. "I have been afraid that his clever son was going to capture your heart."

"Who, Basel Mollison!" She had a pretty way of expressing surprise by lifting her brows; this time they denoted astonishment. Tossing her head to indicate supreme disdain, she went on: "Why, Captain Ingram, I couldn't fall in love with Basel Mollison if he was the last man. The French dandy—parlavoo from Paree; pah!" This little verbal explosion was intended to indicate unspeakable disgust. Miss Sally was nothing if not extreme.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, come, now," Ingram protested, "you don't mean half of that; and Basel doesn't deserve the other half. I'm free to admit that the father isn't exactly my style of a man, but the son isn't a bad sort of fellow—when you take him on his own ground. I really was alarmed when I saw him so much at Daphne."

"Well, I do declare, Captain, if you all ain't the most conceited. If a lady just smiles at you, you think she's in love—and she's only amusing herself."

She dropped her head saucily to one side, and flashed him a look from under her brows. But the mood passed in a moment, and she exclaimed:

"What made you talk about the Mollisons? I was talking about the Amaryllis—and her Captain. I ask you again if you are going to do me the favor."

"Really, Miss Sally, can't you see how utterly impossible it is for me to do this?"

"If you don't promise this minute to take the money I'll throw it overboard."

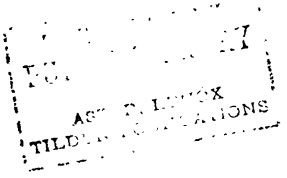
Her tone and manner were again that of the daring, impetuous girl, and knowing that she was capable of just such folly, he tried to snatch the certificate from her hand; but she was too quick for him.

"Promise now," she cried, springing to her feet, and holding the paper out of his reach. "Promise, before I throw it overboard—I'm sure 'nough going to do it."

Digitized by Google

"Come, woman," he commanded, "this is foolishness. Sit down and be reasonable."

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

"Come, come, woman," he commanded, "this is foolishness. Sit down and be reasonable."

"Thank you, sir, for calling me a woman once," —making him a low courtesy—"but promise before I count three. One—"

He sprang to his feet; but she stepped back out of reach.

"Sit down, sir, or I'll throw it overboard anyhow."

He hesitated a moment; but her flashing eyes told him that she had reached that reckless state of abandon where she was capable of any folly, and he reluctantly resumed his seat.

"Two," she cried, waving aloft the certificate.

"Do stop teasing, Miss Sally; sit down and let me—"

"Three."

She let go of the precious bit of paper, and the light breeze made by the motion of the boat carried it far out in the air. Ingram watched it with bated breath, hoping that it might be blown back to the boat; but the wind, after toying with it for what seemed to the apprehensive man a long time, dropped it in the water fifty yards away.

"Stop her, Guy," the Captain called to Lewison in the pilot-house. "Let her go back. I've lost a valuable paper overboard."

As he spoke he hastened toward the stern where a yawl hung in the davits. There was a jingling of bells in the engine-room, a clanging of the shifting levers, and the huge engines began to

Digitized by Google

tug and strain to stop the momentum of the heavily-loaded boat.

The sudden reversing of the engines, together with the word "overboard," which a passenger lounging on the boiler deck had heard and passed along, led to the natural inference that some one had fallen from the boat. But when the craning of necks, and the eager questionings failed to verify the fact, surprise and mystification were added to the confusion.

Meanwhile Ingram had reached the starboard yawl, which, with the assistance of the "sailorman" who happened to be working on the hurricane deck, he quickly lowered to the water. Strangers might have been surprised to see the commanding officer, with so many men at hand, himself enter the yawl; but his unconventionality was so generally known among passengers and crew that few of the onlookers in this instance gave it a thought —though Wedgwood, who had stepped to the side door of the engine-room to see what was going on, did wonder at the "Skipper's haste."

By the time the second mate and his crew had responded to the emergency call, and had lowered the port yawl, Ingram was being rowed swiftly back over the course just traversed by the Amaryllis. He stood in the bow of the boat closely scanning the water on all sides, in search of the little slip of bank paper. Recent rains had riled the Ouachita till its muddy water was much the color of the certificate, which, with the surface

Digitized by Google

still in a state of undulation from the waves of the steamer's wheel, made it difficult to detect such an object.

The second yawl soon overtook the first, and together the two were rowed up and down that part of the river where the paper was supposed to be. Lewison held the Amaryllis in midstream by an occasional backing of the engines, while the curious passengers and crew watched the searchers.

Ingram was particularly anxious to find the certificate himself if possible, in order that no one might see the endorsement, or know anything of the strange incident that had just taken place on the hurricane deck. He did not even dare to explain this to the second mate, who stood in the bow of the other yawl, and often in the manœuvers came close to him. The fruitless search had continued so long that he had begun to think the paper had already sunk, when Bushnell called out, pointing to a spot a third of the distance from his boat to the Captain's: "There it is!"

"Now, Ben," said Ingram in a low tone to the sailor, "let me see you handle a boat."

Bushnell, always eager to show his skill before the commanding officer, gave a sharp command to his men, and the two boats made for the prize. The Captain's yawl was twenty yards from the paper, while the mate's boat was not more than half that distance; but the men in the latter boat were overconfident, and turned so far that they

Digitized by Google

passed it just a little out of reach. In attempting to recover themselves, they again misjudged the distance and fouled the starboard oars of the Captain's boat.

"Pull hard on the port oar," the Captain commanded, at the same time seizing the starboard oar of the nearest man, and thrusting it under the little slip of paper as Bushnell reached out his hand for it.

Having accomplished their errand, the yawls returned to the waiting steamer, where a plausible explanation caused the incident to be soon forgotten, save by a few who wondered at the Captain's eagerness in searching for the paper, and his care in keeping it from prying eyes.

Miss Sally pouted for a time, and declared she never would touch the certificate again. When, however, she saw that Ingram was getting downright angry, she cried for mercy and became more reasonable.

When the incident was finally closed, Ingram found himself facing the gravest problem of his life. While he still hoped that something would turn up to put an end to the ruinous competition that was rapidly exhausting his resources, he had reconciled himself to defeat. He knew that a man of his experience and ability could command a salary nearly if not quite as large as his net earnings year in and year out with the Amaryllis. And as for the humiliation of being beaten in the

Digitized by Google

fight he proposed to make the struggle so sharp as to rob it of part of the sting.

It was the other matter that worried him, the affair of the heart. He was now fully aware of the fact that not only had he fallen in love with his friend's fiancee, but there was every reason for believing that she returned the feeling. No other meaning could he read in the multitude of incidents that had recently been forced upon his attention. The temptation had been hard enough to resist before, now it was increased a hundred-fold.

Here was money at hand to defeat his antagonist, for Henri Mollison knew his affairs so well that the display of such aggressiveness as this sum would enable him to assume, would convince the old man that some rich backer had taken a hand; and the boatstoreman would quickly sue for peace. All this was to be had for the asking. Nay, with it, and on the same terms, was to be had the girl his heart idolized.

As night came on, a cold, drizzling rain set in. Ingram knew this would make the banks muddy at the landings, and make it hard to handle cotton and seed; but such hardships and discomforts were now a relief to his troubled mind. Donning his sou'wester, and his rubber coat and boots, he was out at every landing during his watch, though as a rule he left much of this to the second mate who stood watch with him. Bushnell wondered at this, and he marked the gentleness of the Cap-

Digitized by Google

tain's tone when he gave orders, a gentleness mingled with sadness.

When Grady came on duty at twelve o'clock Ingram still felt no desire to turn in. He did retire to his room, where he removed his outer wrappings and threw himself across the bed. But after trying in vain to read himself to sleep, he dressed and went out.

The weather was worse. The wind had risen, and the drizzle had become a well-defined rain that blew in scurrying sheets across the hurricane deck, and dashed against the side of the texas. The pilot was feeling his way down the tortuous stream with the aid of both headlights, whose dazzling beams he swung from side to side in search of the banks swallowed up in the pitchy darkness. Though the night was so forbidding without, and the next landing an hour distant, Ingram preferred the storm on the open deck to the oppressive quiet of his snug little cabin.

He walked back to the stern of the boat, where he stood a long time leaning on the breast-high hog-chain brace at the edge of the roof. He had always liked to watch the great wheel; and even now with all his trouble, it had a fascination for him as it churned the water in the gloom below. He could feel the throb of the engines as they strained at their labor; and the soft patter of the buckets as they struck the water was soothing to his troubled spirit. Now and again the spray from the whirling wheel was dashed in his face.

Digitized by Google

The manifestation of power held him spellbound. He thought of the hot, hissing steam from the boilers rushing through the throttle to the cylinders, where it pushed first on one side and then on the other side of the pistonhead, dragging back and forth the pistonrod, and swinging the huge pitman with its giant grip of the crankpin on the wheel shaft. The rhythmical exhaust of the engines through the tall stacks forward was as the measured breathing of some leviathan of the deep.

But to-night another thought came. As his eye tried to pierce the gloom encircling the wheel he thought of what a splendid opportunity it offered to escape from all worldly trouble. It would be so easy to let the frail human body fall to instant destruction; nor would anyone know but that it was an accident.

Upon the one hand he could have his heart's desire by betraying his friend. Upon the other was relief from all trouble. Between lay the hard road of duty.

He turned his back to the wheel and went to his room where he threw himself on the bed and lay staring at the ceiling till the texas tender called him for breakfast.

Digitized by Google

Chapter VIII.

THE PILOT AND THE SOFT-BOILED EGGS

Troublesome as were the problems confronting Captain Ingram, they did not seriously disturb the affairs on board the Amaryllis. She always had a good trip of passengers, and generally a full cargo of freight. The fact that she was steadily losing money, and that her owner and commander was facing bankruptcy, did not appear to any but those directly concerned. No one except Ingram and old Mr. Disbrow knew just how the account stood, or the amount of the losses.

Mike Grady, the first mate, seemed to have "gotten into shoal water," as Henderson, the pilot, put it. Mrs. Semperfield and her daughter were making the third trip, and the mother was more than ever determined to convert the crew, though the daughter confined her efforts—so at least it seemed to the sharp eyes of "Socrates" and Henderson—to bringing about the regeneration of a particular member of the crew.

It was evident to his fellow officers that the mate, in the purest spirit of mischief, had entered into an agreement with the two ladies to stop swearing, just as he had not long before solemnly promised the Rev. Mr. Boulder of Columbia to

Digitized by Google

"reform." And having still in mind the look of consternation and despair that came over that good man's face when he heard the epithets that greeted the roustabout who let a horse fall off the stage, they wondered what would be the outcome in this case.

But the peppery-tempered little Irishman had not been long under the influence of the old lady before he began to feel the effect of her quiet, persistent personality. And the strangest part of it was that when she found that he was really in earnest she became, as he expressed it, "more reasonable than the other meddlers"; for she even went so far as to countenance his stipulation that for the present, and until he "had grown in grace," extraordinary occasions should be excepted—though it must be confessed that she did lecture him now and again on the frequency of the "extraordinary occasions." It was amusing, yet pathetic, to see her solicitude. Whenever the weather permitted she made it a point to sit near the forward rail on the boiler deck, at all landings, and smile encouragement upon the "blasphemer."

Thus it soon became a habit with Grady, when there was an occasion to use forecastle language, to glance up and see if his mentor was on watch. But unfortunately for the mate's good intentions, the roustabouts also noted the relation between the benign-faced old lady and the gentle-mannered mate; nor were they slow to take advantage of it.

Digitized by Google

"Captain," Grady said at the first big freight pile, when the roustabouts dropped their trot for a walk, and grinned at his gentle rebukes, "if you don't keep old Mrs. Tractandprayer in the cabin so I can talk mule-talk to these men, I'll never get this boat back to New Orleans."

But Ingram only laughed at the mate's predicament in having to maintain an outward calm while the storms raged within. The roustabouts. however, were not long in learning that mates were as uncertain as princes in the matter of trustworthiness; for Grady would now and again walk back on the guard where he was out of sight of the old lady, and some lagging rooster would get a vicious jab from the mate's stout stick.

But the mate should not be blamed for this silent homage to the old lady. Few indeed could resist the appeal of those mild gray eyes as they beamed benevolently through the gold-bowed spectacles. And then she had such a naive way of misapplying technical terms, to the great amusement of the officers. When she had referred to the upper deck of the boat as the "tornado deck," and corrected herself—the smiles of her auditors warned her of the mistake—by changing the adjective to "cyclone," she finally gave up in confusion with the observation "anyway it's always windy up there." She could not understand why "boiler deck" should apply to the deck above instead below the boilers. While as for "hog-chains" she declared that to be the

Digitized by Google

most absurd term of all. To call those great iron rods that distribute the weight of the boat "hog-chains," when they were neither chains nor used to hold hogs, was simply ridiculous.

But all these little things simply made the old lady the more lovable to such of the officers as could overlook her meddlesomeness and her over-zealous efforts to convert the heathen. And one after another did come to overlook it as they grew to know her better. They were not surprised therefore when they found that Grady was making an honest effort to rid himself of his vulgar habit. Nor were they blind to the fact that the change in him became especially marked when the daughter began to interest herself in the reform work.

She approached the task timidly at first, and only after she had remained a silent spectator of her mother's fruitless efforts long enough to detect Grady's duplicity. Her plan of procedure had been entirely different. Whenever opportunity offered, and there were many, she engaged him in conversation upon subjects of general interest, and never under any circumstances referred to the subject of her mother's discourse.

Whether it was the contrast between this and the mother's too-constant nagging, or the gentle grace of the girl herself that first attracted Grady's attention, it would be difficult to say. Possibly his vanity was flattered when he became aware of his influence over her; and in seeking to

Digitized by Google

indulge this, his own warm-hearted, sympathetic and implusive nature fell under her sway. The poor, starved spirit of the girl, so long circumscribed and cramped by the aggressiveness of the mother, seemed to find here a means of escape from its thralldom. That Grady's nature was so different from that of all her former associates, merely added to the charm.

But no sooner did Mrs. Semperfield detect the growing concern of her daughter for the spiritual welfare of the mate, than she began to lose interest in him herself; or more strictly speaking, as soon as she perceived a possible complication of affections, she was quick to protect Adelaide. Thenceforth the mother devoted more of her attention to the other members of the crew, particularly to Ingram.

"Captain," she said to him Sunday at dinner —she was sitting at his right hand, and as usually led the conversation to religious topics, to the amusement, if not the profit, of the passengers within hearing,—"Captain, why don't you tie up your boat on the Sabbath, so the crew can rest? Mr. Danforth says he never has a chance to go to church during the boating season. It is tempting Providence."

"I am sorry," Ingram responded affably, "but you see how inconvenient it would be from a business point of view."

"Dear me," she cried, laying down her knife, and lifting her hands in despair, "what a degen-

Digitized by Google

erate age. It's nothing but business, business, business. If I ask my husband to go south with me, he can't on account of business. If the doctor tells him he should take a rest, he can't on account of business. And when I ask you why you don't observe the Lord's commandment, you answer that you can't on account of business."

She uttered the last words with a sigh that met with a sympathetic response from the young divinity student on the opposite side of the table, who was returning to his classes at New Orleans.

"Still," the Captain ventured, a sly twinkle in his deep-set eyes, "I must confess a sneaking admiration for a man who is willing to work so hard, in order that his wife and daughter may go south"—he caught a grateful look from Adelaide at his left—"even if he does prefer to rest on Sunday, instead of going to church."

"But, Captain, my husband does go to church when I am at home."

"Oh, well, then, you are doubly blessed. But see here, Mrs. Semperfield," he added with more earnestness, "I don't want you to misunderstand me. I'm not so indifferent to the spiritual life as might appear from observing only what you call the commercial side. You have in mind a certain arbitrary standard, by means of which you seek to measure all men's acts. You really are less concerned in seeing men moral, than in seeing them conform to your standard."

Ingram often took delight in expressing his

Digitized by Google

sentiments so boldly as to shock the good woman; and now, after a moment's pause to see that she was properly impressed with the first remark, he proceeded:

"The trouble with the church is that it has become a machine, an organization, a something to be maintained of itself, and not because of its service to man. Do you notice that when an able minister receives a call it is always to a church that pays more. He is more interested in his salary than in the cause of Christ—"

"Mercy me!" she interrupted; but he swept her aside, as was his wont when mounted on his hobby.

"The congregation is bent upon increasing its membership rather than in saving sinners—"

"Captain!—"

"And most of the individual members had rather say prayers and ask blessings than do right."

"Captain Ingram," she cried, as he finished his tirade, "I'm going to get right off this boat. This is simply sacrilege; it's scandalous; it's blasphemous; it's—it's—"

"It's not orthodoxy," he suggested.

She looked at him in speechless amazement. The young divinity student across the table was scarcely less shocked; the faces of the others at the table, however, indicated a keen appreciation of the set-to between the Captain and the pious old lady. Ingram noticed that Adelaide did not share her mother's consternation; but on the con-

Digitized by Google

trary that her face bore a look of pleased interest—possibly she had still in mind the remark about her father.

"You see, my business," the Captain went on, accenting the word business, "prevents me from going to church often, but at the same time it brings me in contact with those who do go to church; and I have noticed that many of the men who are most regular in observing that formality, are often the last ones to settle their freight bills. And when I have been victimized by some particularly clever trick, at the hands of some exceptionally nice looking man, inquiry generally discloses the fact that he is a regular church attendant."

"Captain Ingram, you don't believe a word of that."

"It's this way"—a smile hovered about his mouth, and lighted up his homely face in a way to rob his words of all bitterness—"it's so much easier to say prayers than to do right; it's more convenient to attend church than to be good."

"Shocking, shocking, shocking!" she exclaimed, and lifted her hands in lieu of the words that failed her. The young divinity student opposite said not a word, and Adelaide smiled to herself.

"You know well enough it's a fact," Ingram persisted. "You know you don't care how good a Chinaman is, or a Hindu, or a Turk; in your eyes he is not good till he is a Christian. You don't care how honest a man is, how kind, loving, and

Digitized by Google

self-denying; the important thing is, does he hold your religious belief—above all, does he belong to your particular denomination?"

"But, Captain," the divinity student at last made bold to say, "the Scriptures tell us that unless a man believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot be saved."

"Let me ask you a question," returned the doughty boatman, now deeply in earnest, and turning to the young man. "Suppose a man believes in and practices all the great truths taught by Jesus, but does not believe him to be the Son of God."

"Unless you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven." The young man's face was suffused by the ardor of his spirit. Mrs. Semperfield bowed her head in acquiescence of the sentiment, and shifted her admiring gaze from the illumined face of the young man to that of her daughter, to see if she also appreciated these words of the young champion.

"Then if a man does believe that Jesus was the Son of God, but does not practice his teachings—"

"But he will practice them, if he believes in him," the young man interrupted.

"On the contrary," the Captain persisted, his face assuming the pleased, yet apologetic, look with which he was in the habit of contradicting an opponent, "my contention is that he does not. For

Digitized by Google

instance, you say this is a Christian nation, and you think it our duty to convert the heathen nations of the world. The mass of our people are church members, and still more of them believe in Jesus Christ. Yet how do the Christian nations treat each other? Why do they maintain great armies and navies?"

"To protect the country," the young man answered.

"Protect it? Against what? Not heathen nations; they have no navies, and no armies worth the name. No, they are to protect the Christian nation against another Christian nation.

"Nor is it any better," he continued with increasing fervor, and without waiting to see if the young man would say more, "among the people within the nation. Professing to love their neighbors as themselves, they are continually quarrelling. Why"—it was good to see those deep-set eyes flashing, as he warmed to his subject, even though his reasons might not be acceptable—"why, nine-tenths of the law suits are between Christians; and they are not interested in determining the justice involved, but in winning the case. This, too," he exclaimed, with great earnestness, "in spite of the admonition to 'let not the sun go down upon your wrath.'"

The pale young student across the table, conscious of the fact that however much the Captain might have exaggerated, there was still more truth in his words than at the moment seemed refutable,

Digitized by Google

looked helplessly at Mrs. Semperfield. But that worthy old lady was not in the least abashed; she was as ready as ever for an emergency.

"Captain Ingram," she cried, turning her gold-bowed glasses upon him, and her face assuming the all-embracing motherly expression that had to do with extreme cases, "you are incorrigible. I shall pray to the Father of All for a special dispensation of grace in your behalf."

But notwithstanding their radical differences on religious matters, the benign old lady really held the Captain in high esteem. His bluff boldness won her admiration in spite of herself, and his manifest sincerity charmed her. Indeed, her highly cultivated virtues, so carefully trained on the trellis of conventionality, were re-invigorated by coming in contact with his crude sense of justice—just as her daughter's character had assumed a new dignity from association with the virile Grady.

Mrs. Semperfield had by this time got something of the men's point of view, and this had made her more tolerant of their seeming irreligion, which she found upon closer acquaintance was not so much a lack of religion, as a disregard of forms and creeds. But there was one feature that she seemed to be unable to grasp, the officers' penchant for playing jokes upon each other. Her religious sense apparently had been developed at the expense of her sense of humor. She was so filled with the idea that this life is merely a

Digitized by Google

brief pilgrimage, in which frail mortals are given an opportunity to prepare themselves for a life to come, that she ever looked askance at what seemed so amusing to them. She herself was the most entertaining object they had seen for a long time, and furnished them with a vast deal of amusement, though they were thoughtful enough not to let her see it.

Wedgwood, the chief engineer, was an incorrigible practical joker; no one was safe when he was about, nor were any so exalted as to awe him into respectful consideration—though it should be said to his credit that, in the main, his pranks were harmless; and when they did overstep the boundary of legitimate fun it was to correct some personal foible that had excited criticism among the men, such, for instance, as Lewison's selfish habit of having special dishes served himself at table.

Lewison, who was a little overfond of the pleasures of the table, numbered among his weaknesses an inordinate liking for soft-boiled eggs, and ate so many that the engineer declared his laugh had become a cackle. But in midwinter the price of eggs ran so high that the steward declared he could not afford to furnish them for the table every day. Mortimer always spoke of what he could or could not afford, as though the bills were paid out of his own pocket; ever economical, he was doubly so since the beginning of the fight with Henri Mollison, and few of the passengers

Digitized by Google

who complimented him on the fine table set realized the amount of thought and scheming that lay back of it.

The pilot, however, not to be denied his favorite dish, bought a basket of eggs from a little negro boy at Sinope plantation. To keep them from possible marauders he put the basket under his berth in the texas, but made the unpardonable mistake of taunting the steward at supper with the fact that he was going to have soft-boiled eggs for breakfast, whether or no. The old engineer, who was at the table when the announcement was made, merely lifted his shaggy brows as much as to say: "Allow me to congratulate you."

John, the ebon-hued texas tender who waited on the officers' table, was instructed by Lewison to go up to his room in the morning, get three eggs from the basket, and soft-boil them in the hot water of the steam-table in the pantry.

"Mind, now, John," the pilot cautioned, "you're not to take them down to the cook. Boil them yourself—I'd just as soon eat rubber as hard-boiled eggs."

"Yas, sah," the boy assented, "Ah knows just how you wants 'em, Mistah Lewison; Ah'll fix 'em."

The significant glances exchanged between the engineer and the second clerk were unobserved by the pilot.

Lewison came to the breakfast table next morning with a face beaming in anticipation of a re-

Digitized by Google

sumption of his favorite fare. John had got the eggs as directed, and in a few moments brought them piping hot from the steam-table. The pilot was too much engrossed with his own pleasant thoughts to note the winks and nudgings among his fellow officers, or to pay much heed to their bantering words.

"Please pass the eggs," Bushnell said in a brusque tone.

"Yes, do," the second clerk echoed. "Eggs were made round to go 'round."

"These are oval," retorted the pilot, chuckling over his own wit. "When I find some round ones I'll divide with you."

"Oh, come, now," Danforth pleaded, "you haven't the heart to sit there and eat eggs all by your lone self."

"When they're forty cents a dozen, I have," the pilot drawled. "Didn't you hear Mortimer say eggs were too expensive to eat—none but the brave deserve the fare."

"Eggs," Wedgwood said, thoughtfully as he stirred his coffee, "should be used for egg-nog only, when they get above thirty cents a dozen."

"Or in salads," the second mate added. "My mother always put hard-boiled eggs on the salad, mmmh!"

"But these are soft-boiled," Danforth corrected.

"Gentlemen," the pilot chuckled, holding up one of the eggs before his gloating eyes, "these

Digitized by Google

eggs are too precious to be wasted even in egg-nog, and the witty Danforth has explained why they can't be used for salad—like mother used to make." He turned it about in his fingers as though bent upon arousing as much envy as possible. "These are genuine Creole eggs—yard eggs—hen-laid and hand-picked. They come high, but we must have them."

It was nearly as good as eating them to see the look of supreme satisfaction on his face. He changed the egg from one hand to the other to keep it from burning his fingers, and, after toying with it in this tantalizing way for some time, held it over a cup, and struck it with his knife.

"Pshaw, John," he burst out in a disgusted tone. "What made you leave them in so long? I told you particularly to soft-boil them."

"Yas, sah," confessed the boy, himself very much surprised, "Ah knows you did. Ah thought Ah was boilin' 'em soft, sah—'deed Ah did, sah."

Lewison, unmindful of John's humble apology, cracked the other two eggs, only to find them as solid as the first one.

"Here, you chucklehead," he cried, betraying a little temper in spite of himself, "take these to the cook to use for Bushnell's salad. Then get some more, and mind you don't go to sleep while they're in the water."

With a hearty "Yas, sah, I 'member," John hastened to discharge his errand, while the pilot drummed moodily on the table with his

Digitized by Google

spoon, and listened with ill-disguised chagrin to the banter of his companions. Presently John returned with three eggs that he declared he had "jus' dipped in de watah."

"Well, I don't want them raw, either," the pilot growled at the boy. "I want them cooked —soft-boiled."

"Yas, sah, day's cooked—day's soft-boiled. Ah reckon day's jus' right, sah."

"They'd better be just right," Lewison mumbled, as he prepared to break one in the cup.

The others at table pretended to be engrossed in their own affairs, but each had an eye upon him.

"The devil!" cried the pilot, when he had struck the egg with his knife. "John, these are worse than the first. What's the matter with you, boy?"

He scowled savagely at the cringing darky, and pretended not to notice the gentle laugh that went 'round the table.

"See here, you black-visaged muttonhead, go to my room and get me some more eggs, and I'll show you how to cook them."

"And give these," the second clerk added, "to the cook for my salad—the kind mother used to make."

The discomfited John brought three more eggs from the hidden basket in the pilot's room, and Lewison went with him to the pantry, whence there came a monotonous chant of culinary instructions, to the droning accompaniment of the

Digitized by Google

cabin-boy's "Yas, sah's." Presently the pilot emerged, bearing in his hand the three precious eggs, and on his face a smile that denoted a return to his habitual good humor.

"Niggers learn easy enough," he began as he seated himself at the table. "The trouble is they don't remember. Now my wife has the idea that when she teaches the cook how to prepare a dish that's the end of it, but it isn't. You've got to keep on teaching them. Why, a nigger 'd forget his own name if you didn't remind him of it."

His audience gave him respectful attention during this little lecture, and all were in proper mood to appreciate his "damnation," when he broke the first egg—though it was with great difficulty that the pent-up merriment was kept from bursting bounds.

Lewison was nonplussed. Had the eggs not been hidden in his own room he might have suspected a trick. As it was, he merely remarked in a subdued tone that he "never did see eggs cook quite so quick," and bade John bring down the basket—declaring he would have some soft-boiled eggs if it took the whole basketful.

"I never would have believed," the second clerk ventured, "that those Creole hens were so hot-blooded."

"It isn't the hens," said the engineer, "it's Father Time. Three minutes aren't half so long at fifty as at twenty."

When John had reappeared with the basket,

Digitized by Google

the pilot again went into the pantry. Evidently he did not intend to waste any time in returning to the table, for when the eggs had been in the water a very short three minutes, he took them out and broke one. There were some half suppressed ejaculations of surprise, followed presently by the impatient command, "Gimmie that basket." There was the sound of breaking eggs without waiting to cook them—they were all hard. Wedgwood had lost one watch's sleep in the night, in order to help the second clerk hard-boil the basketful of eggs.

The laughter that greeted the pilot's return to the table merely elicited the sarcastic remark, "Some of you fellows think yourselves pretty blamed smart."

"Anyhow," returned the second clerk, mischievously, "we can all have some salad like mother used to make."

"And it is to be hoped," Wedgwood added, catching sight of John's broad grin behind the sulking pilot, "that niggers do forget some things."

Digitized by Google

Chapter IX.

INGRAM PLEADS FOR SIDNEY

David Ingram's weather was not all stormy. Now and again the clouds parted and disclosed a silver lining. When on the point of leaving port this trip he was approached by a raftsman engaged in floating logs from the mouth of Red River, who said he wished to go up on the Amaryllis.

"Very well," the Captain answered kindly, supposing the man to be ignorant of the ways of the boat, "the clerk will arrange for your passage."

"But I'm going to Bayou des Glaises," he continued.

"Oh, I see; well, we turn off before we get to that landing; take the Rodney, she goes down the Atchalalaya."

"But I want to go up with you, Cap'n," he persisted.

"And I'd be very glad to have you," Ingram responded, pleased at the honest fellow's compliment, "but you see it is several miles from my nearest point to your landing; the Rodney will take you right there."

"I know all that, Cap'n, but I'm goin' up with you anyhow. You see it's jes' this way. I've

Digitized by Google

been a raftin' fer nigh onto thirty year, I reckon, and yours is the only boat that ever throws me a paper. Jes' as soon as the Amaryllis 's nigh enough to make out who she is, I says to the boys, 'Boys, here comes the paper boat.' And sure enough, when she's going by, out swings that long arm o' your'n, and there's the paper. And I 'lowed, seh, that if ever I went through to New Orleans, and was thar when you was, I'd ride back with you if I had to walk half-way. Yes, seh, yours is the only boat to throw me a paper. I've got six men with me, and two skiffs, and some lines and things; and I 'low if you'll tote me up to the mouth of 'Chafalare,' we can row the rest of the way in the skiffs."

That same evening, not long after leaving port, the second clerk, after making his round among the "deck passengers," said to Ingram in a sheepish way, "Captain, I'm sorry, but I'm up against it again."

"Now what's wrong?"

"Same old story—couple of fellows below can't pay fare—declare their pocketbooks were stolen. Would you mind going down a minute?"

Danforth, though one of the very best clerks on the river, yet had one serious weakness. He was so tender-hearted that when any one told him a tale of misfortune his sympathy so far outweighed his judgment that he was too often the victim of deception. When these things happened among the deck passengers he had recourse to the

Digitized by Google

"Skipper," who, though no less gentle by nature, made it a point not to allow his feelings to influence his judgment.

They went below, and made their way down the gangway into the deckroom aft of the boilers, where Danforth pointed out the two passengers. They were young men, clad in cheap dun-colored clothes, old slouch hats, and rough cow-hide boots; their beardless faces and timid eyes, reflected in the light of Danforth's lantern, denoted anything but dead-beats.

"Well, boys," Ingram began brusquely, "the clerk tells me you had your pockets picked."

"Yes, sir." They spoke together, and the taller one, who seemed also to be the older, tried to meet the Captain's eye, but when he encountered the piercing gaze from beneath the closely drawn cap, he looked away.

"That's too bad," Ingram returned in a gentler voice than he had first spoken, but with his eyes still fixed on the older boy's face. "How did it happen?"

"It was this way, Cap'n," whined the boy, acting as spokesman. "We were so dog-tired we fell asleep on these bags when the boat started; and when we woke up, my pocketbook was gone —and so was Jim's."

"Quite a remarkable coincidence," Ingram commented, dryly. "Didn't I see you on the forecastle an hour ago talking to the mate?"

"I reckon you might 've," the spokesman an-

Digitized by Google

swered, uneasily. "I was askin' him where we were to sleep."

"Were they asleep when you found them?" the Captain inquired of the clerk.

"No, sir; they were sitting here on the pile of freight."

"How long ago was that?"

"About half an hour ago."

"Um!" The Captain was silent for a few moments, but kept his piercing gaze on the young man's face. "Very strange," he mused. "You boys are remarkable sleepers. It is only nine o'clock now; I saw you talking to the mate at eight, and the clerk found you awake at half-past eight, yet you both were so sleepy, and you slept so hard in that short time, that someone went through your pockets—very remarkable sleepers —denotes clear consciences."

The young men exchanged glances, but they did not meet the Captain's eye.

"Now, see here, boys," Ingram continued after a brief pause, "if your story is true, I'm sorry for you; but I don't like to be imposed upon. Look me in the eye"—this time he addressed the younger boy—"and tell me your purse was stolen."

This was a test from which any but a brave man or a hardened rogue would shrink. They were standing in the main gangway leading fore and aft through the deckroom. About them was piled the freight, and on the barrels and bags a

Digitized by Google

little knot of curious deck passengers and roustabouts had gathered. Before them was the battery of hot, hissing boilers, dimly lighted by the lantern that swung above the gauge-cocks; behind them, and still more indistinct, were the engines, tirelessly toiling against the current. Upon either side the blackness of the night hemmed them in with its impenetrable pall. The sounds, too, were strange. From the boilers came the hissing of a leaking gauge-cock; overhead the exhaust shrieked through the 'scape pipes on its way to the stacks; from the engine-room came the rhythmical beat and clang of the machinery; underfoot were the creaking and groaning of timbers; while over and through it all were the thousand and one noises of a steamboat underway.

The boy lifted his eyes to the Captain's, but instantly dropped them. Again he tried, and a second time failed. Then, drawing a plain leathern purse from his pocket, he extended it to his companion, saying, "Here, Bud, 's your pocketbook; give me mine."

"Ah, I see"—Ingram had to smile a little in spite of himself—"you were too conscientious to tell a whole lie; so you robbed each other. That's pretty good—but, boys, that won't pay a boat's fuel bill."

They looked cheap enough as they exchanged purses under the gaze of the amused spectators.

"Captain," the older boy began, this time looking him in the eye, "we didn't mean no harm—

Digitized by Google

'deed, we didn't. We were so powerful hard up, we 'lowed as everybody said you were so good-hearted, you'd tote us up to the mouth of Red River for nothing."

While speaking he had loosened the strap about the old purse in his hand, and after unrolling the three folds, drew from the pocket a small bunch of bills. Opening this he disclosed seven dollars in one's and two's, from which he counted out the fare to the mouth of Red River. The younger boy had but fifty cents left when he had settled with the clerk.

"Now, boys," Ingram said, when the fares had been paid, "I hope this will teach you a lesson. If you had come to me like men in the first place, I might have done something for you; but I hate lying and cheating." The sullen look on the boys' faces indicated anything but good to come from this trite homily. Their eyes were on the deck, and their minds were seething with chagrin and vindictiveness. "Why," the Captain continued in the same hard tone, "if I let everybody ride up and down the river for nothing, you see what would become of me. It's all well enough to say the boat's going anyway, and you won't add anything to the expense; but if one goes for nothing, another will want to, and so on. I don't like to be hard on anyone that's down on his luck, but I must protect myself."

Then followed one of those rapid changes that were so characteristic of the man. After being

Digitized by Google

severe to the point almost of forfeiting the sympathy of the bystanders, he pushed back his cap, and a kindly look overspread his rugged features, a look that was quickly reflected in the faces of the boys, when they glanced up at him.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'll do," he continued in an entirely different tone of voice, "I've got to collect fare from you as a punishment for cheating, if for no other reason, but"—while speaking he had taken the fares from the clerk—"I'm going to lend you this money. When you can spare it, return it to me."

Without giving the astonished boys a chance to thank him, he left the little knot of bystanders, and, followed by the clerk, made his way along the dimly-lighted gangway to the forward end of the boat.

"Captain," Danforth said, when the two had emerged on the forecastle, "if I'm an easy mark —and I don't deny it—what do you call yourself?"

"Well, I declare," Ingram exclaimed, "if there isn't Bonnet Carre Point—the old boat is making good time to-night."

It was on this same trip up that a distress signal was heard as the Amaryllis approached Prophet's Island. The City of Greenville had attempted to run the chute on insufficient water, and had grounded near the lower end of the island. The Amaryllis approached near enough to pick up a line from the unfortunate steamer, and the

Digitized by Google

combined power of the two boats soon worked her off the bar.

"By George, Captain," the commander of the Greenville exclaimed, when the two boats had swung in together, and they could talk across from the hurricane decks, "I never was so glad to see the Amaryllis before. Do you know, we've been on that infernal bar since morning."

"Why didn't you hail the Natalia? We met her three hours ago."

"No, thank you, Captain. I'd 'a' laid there a week rather than ask that skinflint to help me."

Ingram bowed his acknowledgment of the implied compliment, and dismissed with a deprecatory wave of the hand Captain Clay's offer of pay for the trouble and delay caused the Amaryllis.

But the clouds settled down darker and more threatening than ever when Ingram met Sidney at Penelope plantation. The young man's expressive face bore unmistakable signs of suffering.

"It's no use, Captain," he began as soon as he had opportunity for private speech with his friend. "It's all up with me now—Miss Sally has thrown me over."

Ingram, scarcely daring to meet the young man's eye, was at a loss what to say. He could not bring himself to confess what was in his mind; and he felt that nothing less would answer.

Digitized by Google

"You haven't quarreled?" he ventured tentatively.

"Not yet; but it's only a matter of a little time. She tries to avoid me; and won't explain anything. I'll take to drinking again, if it lasts much longer—I surely will."

"No, no, Sidney"—he laid his large hand on the young man's shoulder, and grasped the muscles till he winced. "No, no, Sidney; not that, whatever happens. Remember your mother. Be a man; keep a stiff upper lip, and things will come out all right. Why, Miss Sally told me in positive terms that she fairly detested Mollison."

"Maybe so," the young planter sighed, "but something 's the matter just the same. She doesn't act natural since she came back from N'O'l'ns. She just mopes around quiet and solemn, sighing as though she'd lost her last friend—won't say what's the matter—doesn't even try to tease me."

The last expression left nothing more to be said.

"Well, I'm sorry, Sidney—very sorry—I—"

"I know, Captain, I know," the young man interrupted. "You have always been my best friend, but there ain't anything to do."

"Don't give up, Sidney," the Captain pleaded. "Never say die. You see I'm still fighting," and he smiled sadly as he thought of the end of the fight.

"That's all right for you to say, and easy

Digitized by Google

enough for you to do; but you see I ain't got your grit. If I were you, Captain, it would be different; if I were you"—he hesitated a moment—"if I were you, I could win Miss Sally."

Ingram shot him a quick glance, but Sidney's unresponsive eyes reassured him. The remark had been intended as a compliment to his aggressiveness.

"Well, Sidney, I hope it isn't as bad as you think. I'll have a talk with her the first chance I get. By the way," he added in a lighter tone, "I see you haven't fixed your landing yet."

Sidney gave him a reproachful look. "Captain, if I should tell you how many times I've told the niggers to fix that landing, you wouldn't believe me—I just know you wouldn't."

The opportunity for speech with Miss Sally came to Ingram sooner than he had expected. When the Amaryllis landed at Daphne on her way down, there was that most interesting of young ladies ready to take passage to New Orleans. Colonel Heath, who came aboard with his niece, looked quite infirm, he seemed to be aging rapidly of late. Ingram's account of the incident of the certificate that Miss Sally had thrown overboard had had a disquieting effect upon the old man, although he had assured the Captain that it was her money, and she was free to do with it as she pleased, but even as he spoke a strange look came into the old man's eyes that

Digitized by Google

Ingram could not make out. He would have thought it distrust had it not been for the uninterrupted cordiality.

"This little girl," the Colonel began when he and his niece were met at the head of the stairs by the Captain, "is getting to be a sure 'nough gad-about. For my part I can't see what a young lady wants to buy so much for—'less she's going to keep a store."

"Uncle doesn't see why I want to travel," she spoke up in self-defense, "and he never tires of telling how he traveled all over the world when he was young."

"But I didn't go over the same route all the time," the Colonel protested.

"Because none of your trips was so nice," she retorted saucily. "I could ride up and down the river all the time. I just love this old boat—"

"And her Captain," the uncle put in.

She caught her breath, and threw Ingram a glance that made his heart bound. But the Colonel seemed not to notice it, for he went on:

"Did you ever see such a foolish little goose, Captain? But I reckon the young ladies nowadays ain't like they were before the War, when I was a young buck. Before the War young ladies didn't go all over creation without a chaperone. I don't reckon I'll like the new woman as well as I did the old-fashioned one."

But the light in the old man's eyes as they rested on the bright young face before him gave

Digitized by Google

unmistakable evidence that there was one woman he liked, whatever might be her style.

"Captain Ingram," the girl cried, "just listen to that monstrous talk. Here I've been teasing and begging him to go with me, and he won't do it—he just sends my maid along."

Ingram now for the first time noticed Celestine, the much affected darky girl, who had hobbled up the stairs in her ridiculously tight shoes, and now stood a little way apart, rolling her eyes as was her wont.

"Well, Captain," the Colonel sighed, "I reckon there's nothing for an old man like me to do but to resign himself to the ways of Providence—and women."

Ingram was uncertain whether or not to be glad that Miss Sally was on the boat. He knew but too well that it made his keeping faith with Sidney that much harder; yet her presence gave him a delicious sense of sipping at forbidden sweets. He still felt himself strong enough to resist any possible temptation to betray his friend; and while he realized that the present course could lead only to a sadder ending, the situation was not of his making, and it had come to have such a fascination for him that he was willing that matters should drift as they were.

The Amaryllis had reached the Mississippi before a good opportunity presented itself for a confidential talk with Miss Sally. For, though she had dogged his steps as before, there were so many

Digitized by Google

passengers aboard that the uninterrupted *tete-a-tete* sought was not so easily had. Ingram had been on the hurricane deck watching the heavily loaded boat worm her way through the "Mud-hole," and after she had cleared the bar at the mouth of Old River, had thrown himself upon the settee in front of the texas.

Daylight was barely gone when the boat emerged upon the Mississippi, and the faintly marked distant banks of the mighty river gave it the appearance of vastness beyond what it really was. The air was chilly since the going down of the sun, but he did not seem to notice it, for he lighted a cigar, and gave himself up to meditation.

"Pahd'n me, Cap'n"—it was John, the texas tender, timidly accosting him—"Ah hopes you'll 'scuse me; but does you—does you know you's smokin'?"

Ingram snatched the cigar from his mouth, and ground the fire beneath his heel.

"John," he exclaimed, when the fire was out, and he had made sure that no one else had seen him, "if you ever again catch me smoking outside the cabin when there's cotton aboard I want you to empty a fire bucket on me."

"La, Captain, that dirty water—"

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, sah—yes, sah; Ah'll throw the water on you."

John backed away as rapidly as possible with-

Digitized by Google

out showing lack of respect, as though fearful that some other dreadful command might be given; and Ingram reseated himself on the settee. His forgetfulness in breaking one of his own ironclad rules was a source of annoyance for a few moments, and interrupted the current of his meditations.

"Lord, Lord, Lord!" he exclaimed to himself, "was there ever before such an ass as I am? A man of my years in love with a girl—in love with my friend's fiancee. How could I be such a fool? I must be getting very old."

Presently the form of a woman appeared at the head of the companionway leading to the hurricane deck, and as the closely muffled figure came nearer, he recognized it as that of Miss Sally.

"I was just dying to see you," she began in her extravagant way, taking the seat offered her on the settee. "I wanted to ask your advice about some business matters."

The "business matters," which proved to be a question of the relative merits of the long staple and the short staple cotton as a profitable crop, and which he knew to be the merest subterfuge, having been disposed of, conversation lagged. It was too dark for him to see her features distinctly, but he could hear her sigh, and he saw her several times turn toward him as though she would speak. He was thinking of a plan that had for some time been in his mind, but he still hesitated about putting it into execution.

Digitized by Google

"Miss Sally," he began, when the silence had grown embarrassing, "I've just been thinking of a little story I read a long time ago. It didn't amount to much, but somehow it comes to mind once in a while, as little things will."

"Tell it to me, Captain."

"Oh, it's hardly worth telling; I don't suppose it would interest anybody else. It just happened to catch my fancy."

"Well, tell it to me."

"I doubt if I could recall enough of it to make it worth while."

"Tell me what you remember, and make up the rest—no one can beat you spinning yarns."

"But this was a love story." He enjoyed teasing her, and seeing her impatience grow. It was so delicious to hear her coax.

"I just adore love stories."

He thought her voice had never sounded so sweet as it did there in the quiet of the evening, when the darkness veiled her features just enough to stimulate his fancy. He had always enjoyed the southern manner of speech, the prolonging of the vowels and the slurring of the r's, but he was charmed with Miss Sally's pronunciation. Without falling into the broad "ah" of the negroes—rendering it more as "eh"—she had a way of saying "weatheh" and "wateh," and "loveh," that lent a charm all its own. He now hung greedily upon her words.

"But this—"

Digitized by Google

"Tell me yo' story this minit, seh." And she stamped her foot on the deck to indicate that her patience was at an end.

"Well," he began as impressively as he could, "this story was about two friends who fell in love with the same girl."

"How interesting! Did they fight for her? What were their names? Which was handsomest—no, I mean bravest—I don't admire handsome men any more. But pardon me; tell your story."

He could but smile at her childish impetuosity; it was a momentary return to her natural self.

"I'm afraid," he said, "you don't enjoy magazine stories."

"No, I just hate the to-be-continueds. You never know which way they'll come out till you get the last one."

"Then I'm afraid you won't like this one, for the author didn't say how it ended—just left it to the reader's imagination."

"I hate such authors. But make haste, Captain, and tell me your story."

"Well, as I recall it, these two young men were very close friends, and—"

"Must have been Damon and Pythias, I reckon —I just loved to read about them when I was at the Convent school."

"Yes, come to think of it, I guess those were the names." He had invented the story for his own purpose, and was glad to have names easily

Digitized by Google

remembered. "Well, Pythias had won the heart of the beautiful maiden, Izellia, but he had a rival who still persisted in his attentions. Upon one occasion Pythias was obliged to go upon a distant journey, and he charged Damon to keep watch over Izellia, until he should return. Now it so happened that Damon was so eager to serve his friend that his attentions caused Izellia to fall in love with him."

"How very interesting! And then what?"

"Well, naturally there were interesting times when Pythias returned. He was gratified to find that his rival had been kept away; but he soon noticed a change in Izellia."

"Did Damon love Izellia?"

Ingram hesitated a moment before answering. "The author didn't say."

"What do you think? Do you reckon he did?"

"I don't see how he could—don't you see, she was his friend's fiancee."

"But in the beginning you said these two friends loved the same girl."

"Did I? Oh, yes, I guess I did. I'm a poor story-teller; and you rattle me with so many questions."

His original point was now lost in the confusion, and he was uncertain whether to drop the fiction or brazen it out.

"And you said Izellia fell in love with Damon."

"Yes, I guess she loved them both—girls never know their own minds."

Digitized by Google

"But they know their own hearts." She tapped him lightly on the arm that he might know he had been worsted. "When Damon found Izellia loved him, what did he do?"

"Do? Why, he remained faithful to his friend, of course. Pythias loved her first—it was merely a passing fancy she had for Damon."

"And they didn't even fight for her?"

"The author didn't say."

"What would you have done, Captain?"

"If I had been Pythias?"

"No, Damon."

"Why—let me see; I guess I'd have taken to the woods."

She enjoyed his predicament, for she saw through his purpose, and was determined to push him to the wall.

"Captain Ingram, you surely don't mean to say you would desert a poor girl after she had given you her heart?"

"But think of Pythias; wasn't he to have any consideration?" he inquired, trying vainly to keep the subject from himself.

"La, Captain, he was a man"—she pronounced the word "man" as though it were the least considerable thing in the world—"he wouldn't be any time finding another sweetheart."

Had there been less at stake, had Ingram himself not been the subject of discussion, he might have fared better in his crude attempt at teaching by allegory; as it was, he was plainly conscious

Digitized by Google

of his failure. He made several ineffectual attempts to make his point by indirection, but she parried so cleverly that at last he gave up, and said bluntly:

"Do you know, Miss Sally, I'm worried about Sidney?"

"La, Captain, Sidney's all right. He don't drink any more, nor play cards—and he's very kind to his mother."

"Yes, I know; he has been pretty straight lately, but I'm afraid he won't stick—without more encouragement."

"Goodness! What more could he want? He's got you, and his mother, and Uncle Hal, and—"

"And you?"

She gave a start at his words, and hesitated.

"Yes, of course; I want to help Sidney, too."

"But he complains that you don't treat him as you used to"—this would have sounded flat, if not inexcusably meddlesome, but for his earnestness—"your indifference discourages him."

"La, Captain Ingram, do you reckon I can be a guardian for all the wild young men on Ouachita River? I'd be a poor 'nough missionary—I would indeed."

"Oh, come now, Miss Sally, be serious. I don't think you are treating Sidney right. You know there isn't a better-hearted young man in Louisiana than Sidney Drake; and he fairly worships you. If you were to throw him over it would drive him to the dogs, and kill his mother."

Digitized by Google

"Captain, do you know what you put me in mind of?"

"What?" His attention had again been diverted from the main purpose by her adroit question.

"Of a poem. I'll buy you a copy when we get to N'O'leans."

Digitized by Google

Chapter X.

MISS SALLY SENDS THE CAPTAIN A POEM

David Ingram found plenty to occupy his attention upon arriving at New Orleans. There was no material change to be seen in the "fight" situation, except that it was nearer the end. He took a melancholy satisfaction in contemplating the loss of this last trip, and in negotiating from Mercier another loan. He was deaf to the persistent appeals of the blind pilot to supply the stores for the Amaryllis—as he was also to the intercession of friends who sought to effect a compromise between Henri Mollison and himself.

The solitary grain of comfort to be found in the whole situation was the report that his opponent had been caught on the wrong side of the cotton market, and had "dropped" a small fortune in "futures." But even this was largely offset by the arrival of the towboat Hercules, with her immense fleet of coal barges. The profit on that one cargo of coal from Pittsburg would more than cover the losses of the Whistler, his rival boat, for the whole season.

Old Captain Jerry, David's father, was much depressed over the outlook, though he gloried in his son's "spunk," and patted him on the back

Digitized by Google

when he refused to negotiate a compromise. His mother, when David paid a visit to the little cottage home in Carrollton, began to fret over his haggard looks, for, in spite of his assumed gaiety and his efforts to turn aside her pressing inquiries as to his health, her maternal eye had noted the change. His tall, bony form had grown thinner, and his deep-set eyes more hollow.

"But Davy's game," the father exclaimed with pride, in answer to the mother's forebodings, when the son had returned to the boat, and the old couple were preparing for bed. "Davy's game; he'll go down with flags flying."

"And much good flying flags will do," she retorted, "when the marshal hangs out his red flag."

"But, Mary, a fight—"

"Yes, you men can't talk of anything but fight, fight, fight."

"But if it's a good fight—"

"I tell you, Captain Jerry,"—she always called him by his title when deeply in earnest—"you know well enough there isn't any such thing as a good fight—'cepting the battles of the Lord. What about the Arabella? You called that a good fight, but the marshal sold you out."

"And a pretty figure it cost the Line to down me, too, Mary."

He was sitting on the edge of the bed unlacing a shoe, and paused at the thought of the stirring scene that floated before his mind's eye. His wife was at the dresser fixing her hair, and did

Digitized by Google

not see the spirited look that came over his aged features.

"Suppose it did cost the Line a pretty figure to down you," she snapped, "they had it to lose and you hadn't. It was the same with the Dauphine; she went the same way—and one of the prettiest boats on the river—I just loved that boat."

"Ah, Mary," he cried, jumping up and striding across the room with one shoe off, "that was a fight for your money. Cap'n Hickney said it was the gamest fight ever seen on the river—but I reckon Davy's going to beat it."

"Yes, and lose the Amaryllis, too; and my rheumatism keeping me from going down to see her all this winter. I did think, now that the days are getting longer, you could wheel me out to the levee some evening so I could see her go by before dark—the dear boat."

"So I shall, Mary, just as soon as ever you feel able."

He had stopped by her side, and, as was often his wont when she was at the dresser, he bent his tall form till his chin rested on her shoulder, and their faces were reflected side by side in the mirror. The sight of that rugged and deep-seamed face beside her own chastened countenance never failed to mollify her tone when she was disposed to scold. She caressed his cheek, and said more gently:

"But, Jerry, I don't want to see the Amaryllis

Digitized by Google

after the marshal sells her—she's the finest, handsomest boat on the river."

"Well, don't worry, Mary." He reseated himself on the edge of the bed, and began to take off the other shoe. "If Davy loses this boat, it won't be long before he gets another. Didn't I get a new boat each time I lost one?"

"And hasn't it kept us poor as Job's turkey all our lives?"

"Oh, come, now, Mary, what's the use talking that way?" He let the shoe just removed from his foot drop to the floor, and sat with his hands on his knees looking at her. She was plaiting one of the thin wisps of hair, and kept her back to him. "There's something besides money in this world." His head went up at the thought that he never had yielded or compromised. "You know well enough," he continued presently, "you were always the last man on the boat to surrender." He chuckled till the bed shook, and then went on: "Didn't you throw your arms 'round my neck after the marshal sold the Arabella, and declare I was the bravest man in the world? And didn't you say you'd rather have me on a salary, than be Joe Hazelet's wife with all his boats?"

"Maybe—"

"And didn't you," he went on, interrupting her with the eagerness of a child, "tell Mrs. Ridley after the Dauphine was sold, and right before a whole roomful of company, that you'd rather have

Digitized by Google

a man that was a man without a dollar, than have a coward with millions?"

"Oh, well,"—she began to smile in the pretty way that reminded him of her youth—"I was young then, and just as foolish as you were. But that's no excuse for Davy's going and doing the same thing over again. I'm glad he hasn't a wife to egg him on as I did you—that's one comfort. I'll take it all back, Jerry-boy"—she had dropped the thin wisp of hair that she had been plaiting, and took his wrinkled face between her hands caressingly—"I'll take it all back, Jerry-boy, what I said about your fighting. I know I was just as bad—maybe worse. La, la! What a pity we can't live our lives over again."

"Or live them t'other end to," he added, returning the caress, and looking fondly into her eyes. "When we're young and have the strength to do things, we don't know how. Now that we know how, we're old and haven't the strength."

He gazed long and lovingly into her face, and then added in a tone of satisfaction: "But it hasn't been such a hard world for us after all has it, partner?"

Shortly before the Amaryllis was ready to leave port Wednesday evening, her commanding officer was accosted by a clerical looking gentleman, whose threadbare garb betokened familiarity with adversity. The wife who had accompanied him into the cabin, and who had dropped wearily

Digitized by Google

"But it hasn't been such a hard world for us after all has it, partner?"

Digitized by Google

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

into the nearest chair, bore the air of one reconciled to failure. Clustered about her, and clawing at her skirts, were three restless children, and about her feet a miscellaneous lot of dilapidated hand luggage.

"Captain Ingram," the minister began, grasping his hand with the cordial familiarity of the country parson, "I'm giving up the fight here, and going back to the country where I belong. How much will you charge for my wife and children?"

Ingram glanced at the thin, wan woman, and at the unkempt children, each of whom would make more trouble than a grown person.

"Half fare for your wife; we won't count the children."

"That's powerful kind of you, Captain"—he grasped his hand a second time—"and I appreciate it—yes, sir, I certainly do—but the fact is—well, if I must say it, Captain, that is one dollar more than I have."

"Oh, well, we won't haggle over a dollar."

The parson slowly drew from the hip pocket under the skirt of his well-worn frock coat, a purse, which he opened with great deliberation. Ingram watched him with a look of half-amused interest but the wife gazed down the cabin with a weary stare, interrupted at intervals to admonish the bickering children. The purse, judging from its well-rounded contour, might have contained a small fortune, but when it had been opened by the

Digitized by Google

deliberate parson there was disclosed a great lot of slips of paper—possibly bills payable; and after delving among these a few moments he brought forth a two-dollar bill. He made as though he would step to the office and hand it to Mr. Disbrow in payment for his wife's passage, but instead said:

"Captain, 'pon my word, that's my last cent—and I did want to buy a few little things before leaving the city."

He looked into Ingram's face with a half-appealing, half-demanding air.

"Well, Mr. Shirley, you do seem to be in a bad way; worse at least than I am—now," he added as he thought of his own losses past and in prospect. "We won't count your wife's fare this time."

"That's powerful kind of you, Captain"—he grasped his hand again, this time with both his own—"I'm sure the good Lord will prosper you."

"When are you going up yourself?" Ingram inquired, anxious to stop his effusive thanks.

"Right away, Captain—I'm going to ride up on my horse. I reckon I can make it by Sunday in time to preach—if I keep the old nag moving."

"No you don't," Ingram exclaimed, his shaggy brows drawing to a frown. "Bring your horse aboard, and go up on the boat."

"Captain Ingram"—for the fourth time he wrung his hand—"you overwhelm me; you certainly do. But I always did say you were the

Digitized by Google

freest-hearted man that ever ran a boat in Ouachita River. It *is* a powerful long ride, and a little hard on a man."

"I was thinking of the horse," Ingram answered shortly, as he moved away.

At that moment he caught the eye of Mrs. Semperfield, and knew from the exceptionally benevolent expression on her face that she had overheard what had just passed between him and the minister. He would have gone to her to discuss the gentleman of the cloth, but was accosted by two young men who just came upstairs, and were inquiring for the captain. They were plain but pleasant featured men of perhaps twenty-five or thirty years of age, simply dressed and of neat appearance. Their frank way of looking at the person to whom they spoke pleased Ingram.

"Captain," one of the strangers began, "we are Mormon missionaries, and want to go to Baton Rouge. Neither gold, nor silver, nor scrip have we, for our church sends us forth as the Master did his disciples of old. If it please you, we should be glad to ride up on your boat—we can go down on deck, and be in no one's way."

"Very well," Ingram answered cordially. At that moment he caught the look of horror on Mrs. Semperfield's face, and added, "But you'd better sit here in the cabin."

Later in the evening, the Captain, who had been detained by matters outside after leaving port, found the missionaries sitting alone in the social

Digitized by Google

hall, chatting pleasantly, and glancing occasionally at the long row of tables where the passengers and officers were eating.

"Been to supper?" Ingram inquired cheerily as he passed them.

"No," one of them responded, with a wistful smile. "As I told you at first, we are traveling without purses, as the Master directed."

"Oh, well," the Captain answered heartily, "you're not the only ones; sit up and have supper."

They attempted to thank him, but he waved them aside and went back to his place at the head of the table, where Mrs. Semperfield impatiently awaited his coming. It was with a bit of secret satisfaction that he noted as he went down the cabin that the only two vacant places were at the table where the parson and his family sat.

"Captain Ingram," the old lady exclaimed by way of greeting, as he slid into his chair, "you are incorrigible."

"Now what's up?" His face assumed a look of surprise and child-like innocence.

"I never could have believed you would do such a thing."

"And pray what is it now that meets with your disapproval? Why, I've just been congratulating myself that I'd reached perfection. Lee," he said to the cabin-boy, "feel of my shoulders and see if wings aren't sprouting?"

But her emotions were too deeply stirred to be

Digitized by Google

turned aside by his bantering, or by the smiles of the other passengers at the table.

"And where have I fallen this time?" he finally asked, with pretended meekness.

"Those Mo—Mormons," she exclaimed, stammering over a name too dreadful to speak.

"Oh, yes, pretty nice looking young fellows, aren't they? I rather like their looks—think I could make good steamboatmen of them if I had a chance."

The old lady could only gaze on him in speechless amazement for some moments, and then burst forth:

"I could scarcely believe my own ears when I heard you offer them free passage on this boat. And now they are actually eating at the same table with a servant of God."

"But the preacher is traveling on the same terms; besides, he has a family and is going farther."

"Yes, yes, Captain, I know—and it was so good of you to take pity on the Lord's anointed; but these are Mormons—polygamists—no telling how many wives they have."

"Ah, I confess that is a point against them; it really doesn't seem fair that they should have half a dozen wives apiece, while I have none at all. I agree with you there. They should divide up."

"How can you be so flippant about sacred matters, Captain? I did have some hopes of you."

Digitized by Google

"Did you notice this crab-gumbo?" he inquired, after tasting the soup brought by the waiter, and abruptly changing the subject. "Pierre can't be beat on crab-gumbo." He added a few dashes of tobasco, and stirred the soup thoughtfully. "Yes, sir,"—he seemed to be addressing no one in particular—"Pierre's crab-gumbo, with a little tobasco to make it take hold, makes life worth living. By the way," he said, turning again to Mrs. Semperfield, "did I ever tell you my rule for eating fish and flesh on a steamer?"

"I am not concerned with rules for feeding the body, when the soul is starving," she answered severely.

"You should feed both," he rejoined. Then turning to the daughter, who sat opposite her mother, and on his left, he continued: "When leaving port always eat fish, oysters, crabs, and other sea food; when approaching port, eat game and meat. Fish should be eaten as soon as possible after coming from the water; game and meat improve with age."

"I can endorse the first part of your rule," she assented cordially. "This fish is certainly delicious."

"And here's another rule,"—he was falling into what Miss Sally called his "preaching manner"—"always call a fish by its name, and it will taste better. Learn to associate each flavor with its name. People never think of calling pork, mutton, beef and veal just meat. Now, that fish on

Digitized by Google

your plate is a pompano, one of the finest that swims, when properly cooked—and Pierre knows how to cook fish, too."

"Captain," the mother interposed, "how can you talk of such trifles, when those awful Mormons are on this boat—right in this cabin—eating bread with Christians?"

"Well, to return to our favorite subject," he began, a pleasant smile overspreading his features, for he had begun to feel the effect of the hot soup, "I don't myself approve of polygamy; but you know how it was with those old chaps in the Bible, Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon"—he blurted out such names as flashed on his mind—"and all the other old fellows who found one wife couldn't make enough trouble. God may not have approved of their domestic life any more than we do, but He seems to have found enough good in them otherwise to admit them to His favor."

He paused a moment to see if she would say anything, but as she remained silent, he ran on:

"That is about the way it is with these missionaries and myself. I admire these fellows because they take the teachings of Jesus seriously. Of course I don't know much about their doctrines, and I don't like their family relations, at least as we have the account from their enemies—and perhaps most of us would fare ill if judged solely on the testimony of those who hate us—but that

Digitized by Google

aside, I confess to a profound respect for a man who will go forth empty-handed, as Jesus directed His disciples to do, and preach the gospel."

"Oh, this is terrible, terrible, terrible!" she exclaimed, dropping her fork, and gazing helplessly up and down the table, as though appealing to those about her to condemn the heresy. And then when she had somewhat recovered herself she went on: "Why, Captain, do you know these brazen-faced missionaries have the effrontery to come to Pennsylvania, right into the very city of Philadelphia itself, and preach their blasphemous doctrines?"

"But they surely don't make any converts there," he said, smiling at her heated denunciation.

"Yes, they do, lots of them—and in New York, too, and in New England, and the South, and everywhere. They go among the poor and ignorant outcasts of society, and make converts by the thousands. We are at our wits' end to know what to do."

"You might do likewise," he answered thoughtfully. The smile had disappeared from his kindly features, and he bent upon her a look of more than usual earnestness. "It is evident from your own words that others beside myself have been impressed with the sincerity of these men. For ages your well-kept ministers and priests have been preaching the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man, yet in the very heart of your

Digitized by Google

richest cities, at the center of all that is best in civilization, is the most abject poverty, ignorance and immorality. Now come the Mormon missionaries. They come to these helpless people who are suffering, nay, perishing, from want in the midst of plenty, these people who have been under your ministrations, and extend the hand of fellowship. They take them to Utah, they give them farms on easy payments, or they set them up in some other way, and keep watch over them till they are firmly established. Why, I'm told you can't find a Mormon tramp in the whole State of Utah."

Mrs. Semperfield had never seen her young charge quite so much in earnest and, outraged though her feelings were at the bare mention of Mormonism, his manner had so impressed her that she could only feebly exclaim: "But see what an ignorant, brutish, stupid set they are."

"Granted they are as bad as you say; how came they so? They are not idolators from heathen countries. They were born and reared in Christian countries, within sight and sound of the church; whatever they may be they are the product of Christian institutions."

"Captain—"

"Wait a minute. If the Mormons can take up these people, these outcasts, these ignorant, brutish, stupid people, as you call them, and can in the space of fifty years rear a rich state in the midst of the desert, it looks to me as though there was

Digitized by Google

something more in them than their enemies are willing to admit."

"Captain, my dear Captain, this is—this is—blasphemy." She had recovered some of her mild intolerance, and pretended to stop her ears with her fingers. But Ingram kept on, unwilling to dismount from his hobby till he had ridden down all opposition.

"As proof of what I have been saying, look at the only organization that is making any headway among this outcast element in society, the Salvation Army."

"If they weren't so vulgar, and didn't make so much noise," she responded, brightening somewhat, though still with an air of constraint, "I think I could stand the Salvationists."

"Never mind the noise; they beat drums to attract attention. And as for vulgarity, that was one of the charges laid at the door of Jesus Himself—eating and drinking with publicans. The refined people of His day would have nothing to do with Him because He not only preached the brotherhood of man, but practiced it as well."

Ingram had so completely forgotten himself that he raised his voice somewhat, and attracted the attention of those at the next table, causing Wedgwood to remark to Disbrow at the officers' table: "I see that the Skipper and old Mrs. Tractandprayer are at their daily devotions."

"It is an easy matter," the Captain went on,

Digitized by Google

"to preach the brotherhood of man; it's the practice that sticks them. Because these Salvationists live among the offscourings of society, as Jesus did, you think they lack refinement. Your bishop in his robes cries out from his grand pulpit, 'All men are brethren,' and extends his soft, white hand scented and manicured, as though he were inviting some dirty, ragged tramp to step up and grasp it. The great organ peals forth an anthem; the choir joins in the praise of the Heavenly Father; and you and your neighbors, sitting in your cushioned pews, smile to each other, as much as to say, 'Isn't the Bishop magnificent?' And when the congregation is dismissed you go to your comfortable homes, wondering why the people don't all go to church."

Mrs. Semperfield toyed idly with her food; the Captain's pompano remained untouched on his plate. Three times he had put sugar in his coffee, and now mechanically stirred the syrupy stuff as he talked. Adelaide had listened to the conversation for a time, and then had slipped away unnoticed; but the others at the table seemed much interested, for they gave close attention.

"Contrast all this magnificence," Ingram went on, apparently oblivious of the notice he had attracted, "with the simplicity of the Salvation Army. Go from the cathedral on the boulevard to the barracks in the slums. The audience-room is probably an abandoned store-room, with walls stained and marked by the shelving; the seats are

Digitized by Google

rough benches or wooden chairs. There is no bishop in robes, no surpliced choir, no exalted pulpit. Nothing is there to remind you of a church but plain men and women deeply in earnest. They are not saying to strangers: 'Come to us, brothers and sisters'; but are shouting: 'Here we are, brothers and sisters, what can we do for you? We have fared better; let us share our blessings.' Now that," Ingram said in conclusion, "is what I call practical Christianity."

"Oh, Captain," the old lady cried, moved almost to tears by her emotions, "when I hear you talk so earnestly of sacred things, it gives me hope that you may yet be brought within the fold. Why don't you join the church? Think what a glorious example it would be."

"Yes, yes," he said with spirit, "there it is again —always the signs and the symbols. Didn't Jesus say His kingdom was a spiritual one, that it was in the heart? 'The Kingdom of God is within you,' He said over and over. He laid no stress upon church attendance, but He did command His disciples to minister to the needy, and Himself set the example. He paid so little attention to the forms of religion, indeed, that He was continually getting into trouble with the orthodox people about Him. Honestly, now, Mrs. Semperfield"—he looked into her face with great earnestness and held up his long, bony fore-finger—"if Jesus were to come again exactly as He did before, where would He feel most at home, in the

Digitized by Google

grand cathedral on the boulevard, or in the dingy barracks of the slums?"

But before she could make answer he was called away on duty, and she, aware now for the first time of Adelaide's absence, hastily left the table, and went to look for her daughter. She soon found her on the boiler deck, seated close to the starboard chimney, whose warmth counteracted the chill of the evening air, talking to Grady. The mother did not hesitate a moment to intrude upon their privacy, and interrupt the *tete-a-tete.*

"Daughter, daughter," she cried, when she had discovered that the girl was talking with the mate, "you will catch your death of cold here."

"No, mamma," she protested, "I'm real warm by this chimney." In proof of which she held up her hand. The hand was warm—and so was the heart that the mother so little understood.

"But this night air is full of malaria," the inexorable chaperone persisted. "And you know how particular your father is."

It had long been the custom of the mother, when there was no good reason for her contemplated action, to shift the responsibility upon the father. Usually this was sufficient to bring instant obedience; but to the mother's surprise, and further alarm, the daughter did not respond with the docility that heretofore had been her most marked characteristic. Grady, however, relieved the situation, which was becoming embarrassing, by saying it was time for him to go below; and,

Digitized by Google

with a polite bow to the mother and daughter, he took his leave.

"Adelaide," the mother began the moment they were alone, "I'm shocked at your conduct."

"But, mamma—"

"Not a word, child. To think that you would leave our edifying conversation on spiritual matters for the sake of talking to that vulgar, blaspheming—"

"Mamma!"

"I will say it, Adelaide. He is a blasphemer; he is not fit to associate with Christian people."

"But, mamma, you were the first to seek his company."

"That was my religious duty. To bring a wayward spirit into the fold of Christ does not mean, though, that we must associate with him on terms of social equality. Now, I forbid your talking to that blasphemer any more."

Mrs. Semperfield had so long looked upon herself as Adelaide's spiritual monitor, that she could not conceive as possible any other relation; and so implicit had been the daughter's obedience heretofore that she did not dream of a defiance of her will. When therefore she found Adelaide and Grady engaged in a confidential *tete-a-tete* on the boiler deck the very next evening—she had become so interested in the discussion of the negro problem with the Captain that the daughter had slipped away unnoticed as before—she was so shocked, and so frightened, that she declared it

Digitized by Google

her intention to leave the boat at Monroe, and return to New Orleans by rail.

This affair of the "bachelor mate" and the conventional young lady offered a pleasant diversion for Ingram. His own experience with Miss Sally enabled him to appreciate all the more keenly this little comedy. But, strange to say, he did not at first grasp its full meaning. He was so interested in Mrs. Semperfield's efforts to keep Adelaide away from the mate, that he did not stop to consider whether or not Grady was in earnest; and his mind was so pre-occupied with his own troubles that he had not entered into the good-natured gossip among the officers.

And the Captain needed diversion, for he was sorely troubled. But of the two problems confronting him, that of the heart held his attention most, and seemed least likely of solution. If he lost his boat he could get another, or do without; there were other ways of making a living. But if he lost Miss Sally—

He had declared to himself over and over that no possible combination of circumstances would tempt him to betray Sidney; and, lest he might weaken somewhat in that resolution, he had honestly tried to serve his friend by pleading his cause. He knew where honor led, and he resolved to follow; yet, when she turned those soft dark eyes upon him, eyes full of angels, devils and mischief, as he often said to himself, his heart would leap, and he would be consumed with longing.

Digitized by Google

He had been particularly anxious to see the "poem" that she had promised him the night he made the plea for Sidney. When she handed him a small package soon after leaving port, and made him one of her teasing little courtesies, he thanked her, but would not open it till he had taken it to his cabin in the texas.

The book proved to be a neatly bound copy of the "Courtship of Miles Standish," which, familiar as it was by name, he somehow had never read. It was therefore impossible for him to understand why he should be associated with the poem in the mind of Miss Sally. His first inference, as he began to read, was that he must be somewhat like the doughty Puritan Captain, yet he saw no resemblance unless it might be in certain physical characteristics. He soon became so interested in the quaint little story that he forgot about the manner of its coming into his hands till he came to the fancy ribbon marker opposite the familiar illustration of John and Priscilla, where the maiden says to the emissary of the warrior: "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

Then Ingram understood Miss Sally.

Digitized by Google

Chapter XI.

THE MARDI GRAS TRIP OF THE AMARYLLIS

It was well for the bodily comfort of Mrs. Semperfield, to say nothing of her peace of mind, that she and her daughter did leave the boat at Monroe; for this was to be "Mardi Gras trip," and the carnival excursion on a popular boat meant such a crowd of passengers as necessarily deprived them of many of the little comforts that go to make river travel so delightful.

Both the Amaryllis and the Whistler advertised to arrive in New Orleans Monday morning, and each intended if possible to have the first place at the foot of Canal Street, in order that her passengers might have an uninterrupted view of Rex and his party when they landed from the United States revenue cutter that brings him to his capital city. It is a great honor to occupy first place at the foot of Canal Street, and the boat that is fortunate enough to have that berth at such a time as the landing of the King, is the envy of the whole steamboating fraternity.

The two boats had left New Orleans together, but the Whistler, having so much less freight to handle, was the first to reach Monroe and, turning back nearly three hours ahead of the Amaryllis, she had the call at the landings going down.

Digitized by Google

But in nothing was Ingram's popularity better shown than in this Mardi Gras trip. It had long been the feature of the season with him, and this time his friends rallied to his boat as though it were a personal testimonial—as, indeed, it was. For, notwithstanding the fact that the Whistler was ahead, and there was every reason why she should arrive first in New Orleans, the people waited for the Amaryllis; they waited for her, too, when they knew that cots would be the sleeping accommodations, whereas they could have had staterooms on the other boat.

Ingram's staterooms were all engaged before he reached Monroe on the way up, but that seemed to make no difference to the late comers, who flocked aboard with smiles and laughter, like so many children out for a picnic. The officers of the boat surrendered their rooms to the ladies, as did those of the gentlemen among the passengers who had been able to engage them in advance —for no Southern gentleman will allow another to outdo him in the matter of courtesies to the ladies —so that by the time the boat reached the mouth of Red River, old Mr. Perkins and Bob Dyer, both invalids, were the only two men not sleeping on cots.

No one, however, seemed to regret his choice of boats. The *esprit de corps* was perfect, the passengers forming themselves into a sort of fraternal organization, whose chief object was the advancement of the interests of their principal

Digitized by Google

member, Captain Ingram. How it did warm the man's heart to see so many friends about him, and in such spirits. It was worth sacrificing a steamboat to have evoked such a demonstration of affection.

Sidney Drake was aboard, as also was Basel Mollison, but the spirit of goodfellowship was so contagious that even these heart-troubled young men forgot for the time being their rivalry for Miss Sally's hand, and appeared to be upon good terms with each other. This, in Ingram's mind, however, was not an unmixed good, for he was afraid the clever little Frenchman would draw Sidney into a game of cards that was kept going almost continuously in the social hall. The Captain did not like the cool, calculating air of Basel as he sat hour after hour in the poker game, drinking whiskey, smoking cigarettes and laying heavy wagers.

But Sidney's resolution was proof against his rival's blandishments, and the taunts of indiscreet friends, on the way down to New Orleans, and he refused either to drink or to play cards. Occasionally, when he stopped to watch the game, Ingram could see from his keen interest, and from the light in his eyes when the stakes were high, how hard it was for the young man to resist the temptation.

Miss Sally, whether for the good or ill of all concerned, Ingram could not say, had been detained at home by her uncle's illness, and so had

Digitized by Google

missed the occasion of all occasions on which to distinguish herself, the Mardi Gras trip.

The Captain was sorely disappointed in not making better time out of the river. He had skipped as much freight as was possible without giving offense to shippers, yet, although he had little over half a load, it was twice as much as that of his rival. There was practically no difference in the speed of the two boats when light; but as they approached the full-load line the difference was in favor of the Amaryllis, because of her superior model. In the present instance, however, with the Whistler seven feet and the Amaryllis nine, the difference in speed was in favor of the former; but this again was offset in some degree by the better handling of the latter. Ingram had better pilots and better mates, so that both while underway in the crooked river and at landings the Amaryllis gained time.

It was well indeed for Grady's standing with Mrs. Semperfield that the old lady had left the boat at Monroe, for he fairly outdid himself in handling his men. Wedgwood declared there was not another mate running into New Orleans who could beat it; while old Mr. Disbrow insisted that there never had been a man who could beat it—and his memory of steamboating went back to the days of the Sultana and the Grand Turk, before the War. Such a result required much "stimulating language" on the part of the mate, and Grady, freed for the time being from the reprov-

Digitized by Google

ing eye of the benevolent old lady, as well as the beseeching look of the daughter, did not stint himself. Many a time and oft did the tired roustabouts, as they came up the stage on the run, cast an inquiring look toward the boiler deck, and fall to wondering what had become of their guardian angel.

"Come, men, come," he would exclaim in his sharp staccato, "this isn't a funeral! This boat isn't laid up, ——! —— ——! Move lively, now, move, *move,* MOVE!" His voice rose with each word, till the sounds seemed like missiles. "What's the matter there, Hawk," he cried when a roustabout going out on the stage dropped into a walk, "got paralysis? You, Pony, come away from that bucket—plenty of time to drink when we get underway. You —— —— niggers will never see the Whistler at this rate. Get off the stage with that bale *will* YOU? Roll it down, men, ROLL IT DOWN, I say. You ought to be picking cotton, 'stead of on a boat. What-you-doing-with-that-bale-Pete? ——, ——, ——! I wouldn't have shipped you if I'd known you had the palsy. Get out there, Sam, you son of a lame turtle; the man behind is wearing your heels off!"

And so he kept up an incessant stream of words, commands, appeals, denunciations, encouragements, witty, humorous or profane, with his eye on every man and his whole soul in the work.

Digitized by Google

At each landing Ingram would inquire when the Whistler had gone down. Sometimes she was three hours ahead, once as much as four, and again only two. He almost caught her at Trinity, where she had been detained by a broken "doctor"; but she disappeared around the bend as the Amaryllis came in sight of the landing. On the run down Black River, however, Ingram picked up so much cotton that by the time he reached the mouth of Red River the Whistler was a good two hours ahead.

This practically settled the matter of precedence at the landing at New Orleans, and the Captain, much to his chagrin, abandoned all hope of securing first place Monday. He had freight for Raccouri Landing, and for Prompt Succor, two landings that the Whistler would not make, so that nothing but an accident to the rival boat could possibly overcome her lead.

At Bayou Sara the Whistler was two hours and a half ahead, the added half hour being about the time consumed in making the two landings in the Mississippi. At Baton Rouge the difference in time was still about two hours and a half, showing that there was little if any difference in the speed of the two boats.

There had been some speculation for a time among the passengers as to the possibility of making up this difference in the straightaway run of a hundred and thirty miles to New Orleans, but it had been given up; and after considerable

Digitized by Google

chaffing, which Ingram bore good-naturedly, the topic was dropped. The passengers were unanimously agreed that they had already had more enjoyment than the whole trip on the Whistler would have yielded, and they acquiesced in the sentiment of Lee Darlington, that the other boat "Hadn't enough passengers to obstruct their view, even if she did lay between them and Rex."

But an accident did happen to the Whistler. Her "doctor" gave out again, and she was compelled to tie up just below Eighteen-Mile Point, where the Amaryllis found her shortly after seven o'clock in the morning. She backed out from the bank as the other boat was passing, and came after her with full speed.

The news spread quickly through the boat that the Whistler was behind them, and that they were almost in sight of New Orleans. Those already up routed out the late sleepers, and all were soon discussing with nervous enthusiasm the probable result of the run to the city.

Ingram gave them little hope. He said the Whistler was so much lighter that he feared she would outrun him—and he was sure her crew would "crowd" her all they could. His opinion on both points was soon verified, for it became apparent that their rival was gaining, and there could be no mistaking the evidences of the high steam she was carrying. Ingram could not suppress a thrill of admiration as the rival boat gained on him, for it was a pretty sight to see

Digitized by Google

the Whistler tearing down the river after the Amaryllis under extra steam, the black clouds of smoke rolling from her stacks betraying the eagerness of her crew, and the great white billow of foam rolling before her bows showing the effect of their efforts.

When the passengers of the Amaryllis first discovered the Whistler in their wake, Mrs. Fordham from Jonesville, a nervous and timid old lady who was making her annual trip to "Ne'Ol'ns," as she called the Crescent City, approached the commanding officer.

"Captain Ingram," she begged, looking appealingly into his face, "you surely won't forget yourself, and endanger our lives?"

"Madam," he returned with firmness, "I never race steamboats."

But such a sentiment did not satisfy the younger and more reckless passengers. They felt that if the Amaryllis were "crowded" as hard as the Whistler she could keep the lead. As the distance between the two boats gradually lessened, different ones came to the Captain to inquire if he could not put on a little more steam. Inquiries were followed by entreaties, and these by friendly threats and exclamations of impatience at his "obstinancy."

Basel Mollison said nothing, but the glitter in his eyes, as his father's boat steadily overhauled the Amaryllis, betrayed his enjoyment of the situation. He had hitherto met with a slight

Digitized by Google

shrug of his slender shoulders all uncomplimentary remarks about the Whistler; for he was too blase to be ruffled by such trifles, and even now it was only when one caught an unguarded flash of his eye that his keen satisfaction was seen.

Sidney was almost beside himself with impatience and vexation. "Captain," he cried in excitement, little short of hysteria; "if you let that boat pass the Amaryllis, I'll never ride with you again." Shortly after, he exclaimed: "'Fore God, Captain, I'll never so much as speak to you, if you don't put on more steam."

"Yes, Captain," echoed blustering Lee Darlington, "give her more steam; we'll take the blame. Surely you won't stand here and see your friends humbled—I just know you won't."

Slowly but surely the Whistler crept up. At Twelve-Mile Point she was only a length behind. In vain did Mortimer send the cabin-boys to call the passengers to breakfast. No one but the officers went to the tables, except now and then when some one slipped in for a cup of coffee.

As the boats passed Carrollton they were side by side, sweeping down the mighty river. They were so close together that the voice easily carried from one to the other, and there was much bantering and chaffing between the two crews of roustabouts.

"Heave us a line," called a red-shirted negro on the Whistler, "an' we'll tow you in."

Digitized by Google

"Co'se you can run wid out any freight," went back.

"Nevah mind," shouted another Whistler man, "we'll tell 'em yo'll 's comin'."

"You's gwin' to be in Kingdom Come, 'stead o' New'erlens," came the retort. All the darkies knew the Whistler was carrying more steam than the law allowed. Every sally was greeted by a guffaw from the respective partisans, both among the roustabouts and the passengers.

"Captain Ingram," Mrs. Fordham said, when the Whistler was full abreast, "I don't reckon I should be so much frightened if you were to put on just a little more steam."

"Mrs. Fordham," he answered sternly, "I never race steamboats."

She left him with a crestfallen look, but returned shortly, her face glowing with animation.

"Captain," she cried, seizing him by the arm, "Mrs. Brock is on that boat, and she will never leave off crowing if she beats me to N'O'lns. Can't you put on some more steam? I won't be frightened now—'deed I won't."

"Mrs. Fordham," he returned, severely, "I didn't expect you to get the racing fever. Look at these passengers; they've gone mad; they'd rather blow up the boat then let the Whistler pass us."

"Well," she admitted meekly, "I suppose you're right. But," she added with a sigh, "it does seem hard to be beaten, Captain."

Digitized by Google

As she turned away Ingram heard her remark to Mrs. Purdy, "I suppose it is foolish, and I had thought I was too old for such things, but I must say I'd rather take my chances with an explosion than to have old Mrs. Brock beat me to N'O'lns."

The racing fever that had spread throughout the throng of passengers, begetting a recklessness that would hazard everything upon a single chance—as seen in quiet little Mrs. Fordham—broke out in virulent form among the more excitable people. Had Ingram been of a reckless disposition, had he yielded to the mad entreaties of the excited men and women who approached and reproached him, there is no telling to what lengths they would have gone to prevent the Whistler from beating them to the City. But whatever there might still be of the sporting spirit lingering in his nature, it had been eliminated so far as business was concerned. Business he conducted with methodical exactness; if successful, he was not unduly elated, if not, he accepted defeat with philosophical stoicism.

Slowly, very slowly, though none the less surely, the Whistler crept up, inch by inch, foot by foot, till her wheel was on the after quarter of the Amaryllis. Then occurred the most humiliating thing that can happen to a boat underway, her pilot whistled to pass.

The law requires that when one boat passes another underway she shall indicate with her

Digitized by Google

whistle which side she intends to take; but in the case of boats well matched in speed it is customary for the faster boat to wait until she is absolutely certain she can accomplish the feat before signifying her intention. For, great as is the humiliation of being passed by another steamer, it is as nothing in comparison with the mortification of having signaled to pass, and of then failing. The other boat might be "playing," she might be husbanding her strength for the very purpose of humbling her rival in the apparent moment of victory.

The Whistler blew one long blast to indicate that she would pass on the starboard side. The passengers almost held their breath to see if Henderson would answer. Some still hoped the Amaryllis had steam in reserve, and the engineer would at the right moment open the throttle another turn.

But the hope was in vain. She had done her best within the limits of the law, and acknowledged defeat in the responding blast of her big whistle.

As they rounded Nine-Mile Point the faster boat, being on the short side of the curve, forged ahead till she could have crossed the other's bow, had she so chosen. For some reason, however, not apparent to those on the Amaryllis, she did not, but continued on the starboard side as they swept out on the long curve of the upper ship landing.

Digitized by Google

All hope of winning first place at the foot of Canal Street was now abandoned by the disappointed passengers, and they tried to interest themselves in other matters. A few went in to their belated breakfast; others followed the Captain up to the hurricane deck to enjoy the harbor view of the Crescent City.

The sugar plantations on the left bank had merged into the truck gardens of Carrollton some distance back, and the boat was now opposite the Marine Hospital, nestling in its beautiful little grove of orange trees just inside the levee. On the right bank the plantations—which had disappeared behind the willows on the "made land" of Nine-Mile Point—had reappeared, and followed on down to Gretna, giving the passengers a view of a great sugar plantation on the right bank, and of the City of New Orleans on the left. On the one side could be seen men breaking up the soil, on the other, ships from all parts of the world, receiving and discharging cargo.

It was thus that the stranger got his first impression of this most unique city, a city with but one wagon road leading to the outside world; a metropolitan city from which the sportsman can in a day's walk kill deer, or load himself with ducks; a cosmopolitan city fascinating to the casual visitor, and adored by those who know it best.

"And they do say, Captain," Lee Darlington said to Ingram, "that there are people who will go into N'O'leans on a train." His tone indi-

Digitized by Google

cated his supreme contempt for such prosaically-minded persons, and then he added: "For my part, I 'lowed if there w'n't no boat running, and I hadn't a horse, and was too lame to walk, I might go to N'O'leans on a train—but not before."

Ingram sympathized with the crude sentiment of the young planter, for the magnificent panorama of the river harbor had a peculiar charm for him, but the form of the Whistler just ahead loomed so large on his horizon that he gave little attention to the scenery, and merely smiled at Lee's remark. To come so near to succeeding, and then to fail, hurt. He stood just aft of the bell, his left foot on the rail that protected the hatchway leading below, the visor of his cap pulled close over his eyes, apparently listening to the remarks that Lee was dividing between him and old man Hawkins from Black River, but in reality he was keenly on the alert for anything that might happen to restore his prestige with his friends.

As they passed the upper ferry Ingram's quick eye caught sight of a huge ocean grayhound swinging out into the river a mile below. A questioning glance at Henderson in the pilot-house received an intelligent nod; he also had seen it. And the Whistler ploughed on ahead kicking up her heels in the face of the Amaryllis.

Ships when in their proper element are graceful, self-controlling creatures; but in a long, nar-

Digitized by Google

row harbor, such as the Mississippi affords at New Orleans, they are as unwieldy, and sometimes as destructive as the proverbial male bovine in a ceramic bazaar. Collisions between them and the river steamers are avoided solely through the efforts of the latter. In this instance a powerful ship-towing tug was pulling the bow of the great steamer slowly out from her dock into the current. It would be possible for a man of keen judgment and long experience to determine about how long it would take the steamer to swing around far enough to use her own engines.

Both the Captain and the pilot of the Amaryllis were now making that calculation, and the accuracy of their judgment was attested by the fact that they arrived at the same conclusion, for when Ingram nodded toward the port side and raised his brows, Henderson nodded "yes."

The Whistler for the past quarter of an hour had been in a position to cross the bow of the Amaryllis, yet she held on as before. Doubtless her captain and pilot had arrived at a different conclusion from that of Ingram and Henderson regarding the movement of the ocean grayhound. Or it is barely possible that in their elation at thus beating their rival they had not reckoned at all with the big hulk that loomed up in the distance.

As the two boats approached the ocean leviathan, which, together with the big tug at the end of a long tow-line, reached from the wharf far out into the stream—beyond the middle of the river,

Digitized by Google

it seemed—the Whistler turned to starboad to go around her bow; but even as she did so, the steamer, having swung far enough to permit the use of her own power, started her engines, which sent her ahead in a long, graceful sweep, necessitating a still longer detour on the part of the Whistler, and at the same time opening a narrow passageway between her stern and the wharf.

Thus, though the Amaryllis was four or five lengths behind her rival, by darting in behind the steamer while the Whistler went around, their relative positions were reversed when they had passed the ship.

It was now too late for the faster boat to retrieve the unpardonable mistake. The lead the Amaryllis had obtained through the better judgment of her officers, enabled her to creep close up to the King's dock at the foot of Canal Street, where Rex within a few hours would inaugurate his world-renowned Carnival.

"Captain Ingram," old man Hawkins said, when the lines were fast, and the Whistler had squeezed in behind her, "you're the luckiest man on the river."

"Luck!" Lee echoed disdainfully. "I reckon if you were to split open that head of his, you'd find something in it besides luck—you certainly would."

Digitized by Google

Chapter XII.

THE CAPTAIN MAKES AN UNEXPECTED RESCUE

The momentary feeling of elation that came to Ingram from beating the Whistler into port, and thus placing his passengers at the highest vantage point for seeing the landing of Rex—and it would have been a stolid nature indeed not to respond to the congratulations of his friends—was speedily followed by a sense of the hopelessness of the contest with Henri Mollison. What did it matter if he did have full cargoes of freight and four-fifths of the passengers? True, it signified that the people along the river would stand by him, but the losing rates at which the business was conducted could lead to but one result, his extinction as an independent steamboatman.

To cease to be an independent steamboatman! No prince ever looked forward with more dread to the imposition of an overlordship. He had been his own master so long, and so completely, that his naturally independent character had been developed almost entirely under free conditions; but though it was hard to look forward to taking orders from another, it was still harder to bow to Henri Mollison—that he would not do. The rich and powerful boatstoreman might annihilate him; he could not compell him to surrender.

Digitized by Google

And, as if there were to be no peace for the troubled Captain on any hand, he found it harder and harder to keep Miss Sally out of his thoughts. This was his real trouble. To fight an enemy were easy, even when defeat was certain; but to cross a friend, with success as sure as the other defeat—ah, that were indeed hard.

Sidney's conduct on the trip down had been most exemplary; not only had he abstained from patronizing the bar and the poker table, but he had danced and made merry with the young people, discussed politics and the cotton prospects with his elders, and conducted himself quite as a young man should. Yet there was about him an air of tenseness that told Ingram of the struggle within, and of the possibility of giving way if unduly tempted. If the young planter suspected the Captain of unfaithfulness, he gave no sign. He was the same genial "Sid," though perhaps a trifle less cheerful, and a little less given to the boyish good humor that had hitherto been one of his chief social assets.

During the Mardi Gras festivities, the landing of Rex from his royal ship at the foot of Canal Street, Monday—after a parade up and down the harbor, to the accompaniment of salutes from the American and foreign men-of-war lying at anchor in mid-stream—the gorgeous parade of Proteous in the evening, the marvelous procession of Rex on Tuesday, and the still more imposing display of Comus Tuesday evening—not

Digitized by Google

to mention the grand balls at the Armory and the French Opera House—there was such a delirium of joyous excitement, such a bubbling over of universal good will, that few had time to think of the heavy-hearted Captain who was nearing the end of a losing contest with the rich and powerful boatstoreman.

There was one, however, who was not unmindful of Ingram's plight, the blind pilot. John Leeds, "Generous John," as many affectionately knew him, had brooded over the situation, and had analyzed its various elements till he had hit upon what he thought was a way to serve his friend. John was not what would be called a business man, as the term is commonly understood; his nature was of the sentimental rather than of the practical kind, and he was too apt to be dominated by the element of self-sacrifice that marks the hero. Hence, having been repeatedly rebuffed in his efforts to lend Ingram direct assistance in the present struggle, he now called upon the old commission broker, who he knew was advancing money on the Captain's notes.

"Mr. Mercier," he began when he at last had got the broker's attention—for the old man would insist upon having his little visit with Dorothy before talking business—"I understand that you are advancing money to Captain Ingram to carry on this fight. Would you mind telling me as a mutual friend about how much you intend to lend him?"

Digitized by Google

"Certainly not in the least," the kindly old broker answered, glancing first at Leeds and then at the child in his lap. "I have told him I would lend up to two-thirds the value of his boat, but I don't mind telling you that I shall be liberal in making the appraisement. If there were any show whatever of his winning, I should let him have all he needed, but there is no use in wasting good money, and allowing him to cripple himself beyond repair."

Leeds could not see the sympathetic, wistful look in the old man's face, but he knew it was there from the warmth of his tone. A momentary silence followed, in which the blind pilot carefully considered the idea in his mind, and Mercier toyed with the thin, white hands of the little girl before the grate in which some pine knots blazed and sputtered fitfully.

"How many more trips can he make?" Leeds finally inquired.

"One—possibly two."

"Well, Mr. Mercier, I happen to have a little money to invest, and as Ingram will not let me lend him any, I have come to ask you to sell me one of his notes."

"Certainly, if you care to risk the security—you understand what that is, and that I make no guarantee."

The broker summoned a clerk, who soon brought the last note drawn by Ingram. When the pilot had drawn a check for the required

Digitized by Google

amount, guiding his hand so carefully by the tiny pin-pricks in the paper that a stranger would never have suspected that he could not see, he said:

"Now Ingram owes you that much less, doesn't he?"

"Owes me?—yes."

"And you can lend him that much more?"

"No"—the broker had to smile at the kind-hearted man's simplicity—"no, Mr. Leeds, the situation is unchanged. While he owes me that much less, his outstanding obligations are the same as before, and I still feel myself bound to keep the prescribed limit."

Poor Leeds! Possessed by a generous impulse he had been so eager to help his friend that this had been overlooked. For a time he remained in deep meditation, turning the note in his hand over and over and repeating softly to himself: "That's so, yes, that's so—I hadn't thought of that." Then he addressed the broker who had been watching him.

"You say he has given you seven of these notes?"

"Seven altogether—counting the one you hold."

"And you will honor not more than eight?"

"Not more than eight—it wouldn't be business, you know."

"Daughter, come here," the pilot said, addressing Dorothy.

Digitized by Google

The child slipped quickly from the broker's knee, and went to her father, the serious little face looking questioningly into his.

"Read that to me." He handed her the slip of paper in his hand.

She read aloud in her childish treble the form of a promissory note, toiling through the script, and stammering over the figures.

"Now place it in the fire where it will burn," and the father pointed to the grate.

The broker made a move to intercept the child, but she eluded him, and disregarding his command to stop, threw the precious bit of paper into the midst of the flames.

"Good God, Leeds," the old man cried, as the downy cinder was wafted up the chimney, "what do you mean by destroying money like that?"

The pilot's seared and scarred face bore the gentle look that it always assumed when he spoke to a woman or a child.

"Oh, nothing, Mr. Mercier; I just felt a little chilly, and wanted something to warm my heart. Ingram's credit is now good with you for two notes."

Wednesday evening the passengers assembled aboard the Amaryllis for the trip home. The weather had been perfect—"king's weather"—the festivities uncommonly elaborate, and all returned to the boat in the best of spirits—that is, all save Sidney.

That well-intentioned but weak young man had

Digitized by Google

gone ashore with Lee Darlington and Basel Mollison soon after the boat arrived in port, and Ingram had heard nothing of him till just a few minutes before backing out from the wharf. The flushed face and the shifting eye told only too plainly what had happened in the meantime; but Ingram pretended not to notice the tell-tale signs when he met him, nor was he so much shocked at the discovery as he had supposed he should be. He was too much occupied with the struggle within himself to weigh carefully his friend's claims upon him.

When the Amaryllis was at last underway, and the cabin cleared after the evening meal, the young folks, tired as they were from the doings in port, found themselves unable to resist the strains of the little orchestra, and were again on the floor, dancing. But Sidney, who had been one of the gayest of the party on the way down, now refused to join them. Instead, he took a position behind one of the players at the poker table to watch the game.

Ingram passed up and down the hall at frequent intervals, taking note of his friend's actions. To an invitation to come to his room he received a trivial excuse, but thought it best not to press the young man too hard. Yet he was very much worried. He knew that Sidney had settled with his agent for the season's business, and, according to the plans confided to him on the way to the city, he must now have in his pos-

Digitized by Google

session the money for the discharge of the mortgage on Penelope plantation. Ingram recalled with what pride Sidney had told of the success of the long struggle to lift the mortgage, dwelling at length upon the sacrifice his mother had made, and upon her happiness now that it was over.

The young Captain now fully appreciated the situation. To have money in his pocket and alcohol in his brain was a combination that, in the presence of a friendly game of poker among old neighbors, was likely to prove too much for Sidney.

"Captain," said Mr. Grey, accosting him in front of the office, "can't you stop that game?"

Grey was the young minister who had recently come to Columbia, and who had distinguished himself in Ingram's eyes by his liberal religious views.

"I wish I could, Mr. Grey," the Captain answered with much feeling, "I wish I could, with all my heart. Of course I could forbid their playing here in the cabin; but if I did, games would begin in the staterooms, where they would be free from even the restraint of public opinion. It is bad enough when there are disinterested persons looking on."

"Possibly you are right," the minister admitted, thoughtfully. "Still, I cannot help thinking that something should be done to wipe out this terrible curse of gaming and drinking."

Digitized by Google

"Something is being done," the Captain returned. "There is very little such dissipation now, as compared with what there was before the war."

"True, Captain, that is true; I myself can recall some of the change. To what do you attribute it?"

"To the quiet but persistent force exercised by every good man and by every good woman, to public opinion. Human nature tends to uniformity. Two persons brought into close association are apt to become alike in character, the final result depending upon the stronger personality of the two. You are opposed to gambling, I am opposed to gambling; by our example, and perhaps by an occasional word dropped in the right place, we influence somebody. The same is true of others. There is no human being who does not influence somebody. But if we should attempt forcibly to stop a game, we should cause those who now respect us to hate us; we should drive them to anger, when they might ultimately listen to reason, and should cause them to add deceit, or possibly violence, to the first offence."

"Your reasoning appeals to me, Captain; and yet as a minister of the Gospel I often feel impelled to do something more summary."

"Ah, Mr. Grey"—it was evident from Ingram's tone and manner that he was very much in earnest—"that is the very reason why you should not do something summary. Always

Digitized by Google

remember that God did not destroy Satan, nor close the gates of hell. We cannot be free moral agents unless we can go to hell if we want to. God has given us a plan by which we can escape hell, and has made plain the reasons for doing so; but He has not, He cannot use compulsion."

A little knot of passengers gathered about the two men as they talked, and the discussion soon became general. But the Captain had no heart for discussion this evening. Dearly as he loved an argument—particularly one of a religious turn—he could not keep his thoughts from Sidney. His hard day's work in the city called for rest, and ordinarily he would have gone to bed and let Grady go on duty, but he could not leave his friend in such danger, and so chose the long watch himself. Whether or not it was due to his presence, Sidney retained his self-control during the evening, and finally went to his room, much to the Captain's gratification.

The next morning the young planter appeared somewhat more natural, though there was still about him an air of despondency; and he continued to avoid Ingram's presence as much as possible, and steadily repelled all advances toward their former intimacy. Basel Mollison and Lee Darlington, and a few others, had played till far into the night, and had risen late in the morning, showing plainly the effects of the strain. But a few drinks at the bar put them in condition to start the game soon after breakfast, and it was

Digitized by Google

continued without interruption, save for a change of participants, as an unlucky player made way for one who wished to try his luck, throughout the day.

Toward evening when the Captain came down from his room he found Sidney standing before the bar with some companions. Empty glasses on the counter told the tale; and the boisterous laughter made it plain that it was not the first drink.

Basel Mollison sat at the farther side of the poker table, with his back to the wall, from which position he could watch Sidney, and at the same time keep an eye on the Captain. He pretended to be giving his whole attention to the game; and, judging from the stakes on the board, no one would have thought otherwise; but Ingram several times caught the covert glance thrown at Sidney, and noted the faint, malicious smile that now and again played on the handsome face of the young Frenchman, as the hilarity of the young man at the bar increased.

Ingram chided himself for not spending more time in the cabin during the day to give Sidney the full effect of his bracing presence. He now thought to repair the damage by inviting the young planter to his private cabin for the purpose of discussing some important business matters; but the invitation was put aside with a good-natured raillery that could not be overcome without downright rudeness.

Digitized by Google

The Captain was at his wits' end. The Amaryllis would reach Penelope landing early next day. If the young man could be kept from yielding to his passion to-night, all might be well. But Sidney knew that he was being watched, and he had taken just enough whiskey to awaken the animal cunning in his nature, and to prompt him to do his utmost to thwart the efforts of his zealous friend.

After supper Ingram was detained on the upper deck for some time while the boat was making her way over the bar at the mouth of Red River. When relieved from this duty he hurried to the cabin only to find Sidney seated at the card table with a stack of poker chips before him. The flushed face and the feverish eye told how thoroughly he had entered into the spirit of the game. But what most impressed Ingram as he came upon the scene was the look on the face of Basel Mollison. For one brief instant the young man dropped his habitual *sangfroid,* and permitted the real spirit within to betray his satisfaction at the triumph.

Ingram had Disbrow send a cabin-boy to Sidney, requesting his presence at the office a moment to sign some papers; but the request was ignored. Unable longer to restrain himself, the Captain went to the young man, and whispered in his ear:

"Sidney, give me one minute. I beg of you, just one minute—for the sake of Miss Sally."

Digitized by Google

Sidney, who was in the act of shuffling the cards, paused an instant at the mention of that name, and glanced up at the anxious face of his friend. He hesitated; but catching in Basel's eye the cold, contemptuous sneer with which he so often swept away the scruples of wavering novices, he exclaimed with a boisterous laugh:

"That's all right, Cap'n, that's all right—only want to play one hand, you know; then I'll be with you—cut, Lee." The last remark was addressed to Darlington, who sat at his right.

Again Ingram caught Basel's malicious look of triumph. It was maddening. He was tempted to seize his friend, and drag him forcibly from the table; but he reflected that such public humiliation could produce only harm. Argument was equally out of the question. He stood irresolute while Sidney dealt the cards, and then left the cabin to escape the effect of the scene. At the door he met Mr. Grey, and the compassionate look on the young minister's face showed that he had seen and understood what had happened; but neither of them spoke.

The wind had crept around to the northeast, and a drizzling rain had set in. The Captain went to the guard and turned his face up to the cold mist. It was soothing to his feverish skin.

Suddenly an idea came to him—came to him as a blow that made him stagger. Why need he concern himself longer about this man? Had he not done all, and more, that friendship demanded?

Digitized by Google

Why longer forego the happiness that lay before him? Why withhold his hand from the prize to be had for the taking? Why add to business failure this supreme disappointment? Business failure, indeed, need not come, should he marry Sally Heath. What was there now to restrain him from gratifying both his ambition and his heart's desire? What? Nothing but a young man too weak to fight his own battle.

When the heart seeks evil the mind is ever ready with reasons and excuses. As these thoughts surged through Ingram's brain, another idea came. Was he, after all, working for the best interests of his friends? Was not Miss Sally as much to be considered as Sidney? And what prospect was there for her happiness should she marry the young planter?

The problem had never appeared to him in this light. He was fascinated. Why not act for Miss Sally—and himself? Nay, it was not necessary that he should do anything. He had merely to stop doing, to cease his efforts, and the natural course of events would work matters out to his satisfaction.

He glanced into the brilliantly-lighted cabin. The young folks were still dancing; the soft strains from the orchestra came to him mingled with the exhaust in the stacks behind him. The poker game was still in progress. He walked to the forward end of the boiler deck and peered into the darkness. Up ahead was the govern-

Digitized by Google

ment light at the mouth of the Atchafalaye, where the Amaryllis would land to leave freight. She would land also at De Sota on the head of the island. Still it rained; it would be a hard night on the roustabouts—and on those who had to stand watch with them.

He returned to the cabin, where it was bright and warm. The soft strains of the music rose and fell in rhythmic unison with the swaying bodies of the dancers. Some of the elderly passengers looked on, the ladies from the ladies' cabin, the gentlemen from the social hall. But Ingram's eyes were upon the poker table. The betting was heavier, apparently, for there was now little if any conversation among the players, and no laughter or joking—only the feverish earnestness of reckless men in pursuit of fortune. Sidney was oblivious of everything save the cards. Basel vouchsafed the Captain a swift glance as he came up, but kept his attention on the game.

Seven men were now at the table, and a dozen more sat or stood about looking on with an absorbed interest scarcely less than that of the players. There was no reason to suspect foul play, since all were planters along the river, and well known to each other; but there were two men, Basel Mollison and Clay Ridley, who were fearless players; and though they had never been openly charged with dishonesty, their winnings were sometimes suspiciously large.

"Do you still believe in leaving open the gates

Digitized by Google

of hell?" Mr. Grey asked, as Ingram turned from the crowd at the table.

The Captain glanced quickly at the young minister's face. The question touched him as though his guilty thoughts had been betrayed. He was on the point of making some answer when the pilot blew for Barbre's Landing, and he availed himself of the excuse to go out on the boiler deck. He was followed by a few passengers, those who made it a point always to be out forward when landings were made; but there was little to be seen, and the night was disagreeable. The two headlights pierced the black mist like two giant gray fingers feeling for the landing as the boat approached the bank. A few of the young folks remained to see the little jag of freight put off, but the others scurried back to the warm cabin.

Ingram remained on the hurricane deck while the Amaryllis touched at Water Valley, to drop a small consignment of freight, and at De Sota on the head of Turnbull Island, to land some passengers. From there to the mouth of Black River there would be no landings, unless in response to hails, or for wood.

When the head of the island had been cleared, and the boat had begun the ascent of the thirty miles of crooked, desolate, uninhabited Red River to the mouth of Black River, Captain Ingram did not go below to the inviting cabin. Instead, he paced the hurricane deck like a caged

Digitized by Google

beast. Never before had he wrestled with such a problem; never before had he found right and wrong so jumbled together that he could not untangle them; never before had he hesitated in making a choice.

He was accustomed to deciding questions offhand. In his mind matters of great moment rapidly took shape, and were as quickly settled; but now all was confusion. Now he was disturbed by the faces peering at him out of the cold, wet blackness that enveloped the steamer. He saw the handsome face of Sidney, flushed with whiskey and the excitement of the game; again, it was the refined and gentle features of Mrs. Drake, chastened by adversity, pleading for her son. But ever between these two, and for the moment blotting out both, came the sweet face of Sally Heath, beseeching the love that, but for Sidney, he would so gladly give.

It had set in for an all-night rain, but he heeded it not; on the contrary, it was a relief to have the cold mist in his face. The headlights swung from side to side, shooting out their long fingers as the pilot searched the banks of the tortuous stream. Now and again, as an exceptionally sharp bend was approached, the whistle sounded a sonorous blast that reverberated through the timber to warn possible descending boats. The thought of the huge steamer with its precious cargo of human lives plunging at full speed through the forbidding darkness, up the

Digitized by Google

most crooked of rivers, dodging overhanging trees that reached out for the frail woodwork of the cabin, shaving snags that were ready to tear the hull asunder, with only the skill and fidelity of the pilot to prevent an appalling disaster, would have been thrilling to a stranger; but it meant nothing to Ingram.

He went below. The dancing had ceased, and the cabin-boys were setting up cots for the passengers who had no rooms. A hush had come over the merry-making of the evening. The older folks had already retired; and such of the younger folks as still remained in the cabin were sitting or standing here and there in pairs entertaining each other with whispered nothings.

But the Captain had eyes for none of these. He saw only the poker table, and its now much reduced circle of players. Lee Darlington had been the last to drop out of the game, leaving still at play, Mollison, Ridley and Sidney. Gathered about these three desperate men were a half-dozen who had lost their money, but now remained to see who should finally win it all. There was no longer laughing or joking. Speech even was unnecessary; for each act and motion, each lifting of the brows or glance of the eye was so well understood that there was no occasion for words. Both the players and the spectators were possessed by that absorbing interest that holds men when human lives are at stake, or great fortunes in the balance.

Digitized by Google

The game had long since passed the stage where the players had any use for the white chips; nothing but the red and the blue chips could now satisfy their impatient eagerness. Sidney had a goodly pile in front of him, but Ingram could not tell how many times he had had to go to the "bank" since the play began. The young planter did not notice the Captain when he joined the spectators; his eyes never for a moment left the cards in the hands of his opponent. Though the game was still three-handed, Sidney and Mollison faced each other as though it were a duel between them.

Ingram was now conscious of the fact that he did not feel the same emotion as when he had first seen Sidney at the table. He found himself repeating over and over: "Am I this man's keeper?" And then he fell to justifying himself. "Have I not pleaded with him seventy times seven? Have I not for his sake stifled the dearest longings of my heart? What other friend would have done as much for him? Has he not deliberately chosen in the face of it all? Why stand longer between him and his fate? No," he said to himself, in grim determination, "I am done. From now on he must shift for himself."

But though Ingram had abandoned Sidney to his fate, he had not the hardihood to stand by and see him make the final plunge. Nor had he any desire to talk with the young minister, whose eye he caught in a momentary glance as he turned

Digitized by Google

from the table. He was in no condition to discuss ethics, but was looking for justification for his action, something that he knew he should not get from Grey. Lighting a fresh cigar he went out on the boiler deck and ascended to the hurricane deck. He felt better with the cold mist in his face. With one foot on the forward railing he stood for a time watching the long fingers of dazzling rays from the headlights searching the river banks, as the pilot swung them to port or to starboard. But nothing could long hold his attention—nothing, that is, but the vision of Miss Sally, whose sweet face and pleading eyes ever rose before him.

He recalled that this was not his watch, and went to his room, where, after throwing off his wet coat, he stretched himself on the bed. But he could not sleep. The moment his eyes were closed he was haunted by the beautiful face of Sidney's mother delicately seamed by long anxiety for her wayward son. Sidney's features had now left him, but the pathetic face of the mother had become the more persistent. He tried to escape its accusing look by calling up visions of Miss Sally.

He rang for the texas tender to bring fresh drinking water; and when John respectfully called his attention to the pitcher of iced water already on the stand, he excused himself in an embarrassed manner. He gulped down the glassful the servant handed him, and then a second one;

Digitized by Google

the cold water felt good. When the young negro had gone he slipped into his heavy coat of pilot cloth, lighted a fresh cigar, and went out. It was almost time for him to go on watch, but he did not go below for his midnight lunch. He would rather pace the deck in the drizzling rain than see Sidney.

The shrill little whistle on the boilers sounded the end of the long, and the beginning of the short, watch.

"Pretty fierce game down there, Cap'n," Grady said, as they met at the head of the forward companionway.

Ingram made no answer, other than a grunt of acknowledgment; and the mate, seeing that his superior officer was not in a talkative mood, passed on to his room in the texas.

"That's a game for your life," the second engineer said, a half hour later when he came up. "Stopped to look on a minute. I tell you, Cap'n, that young Drake is a dead game sport—he'll call any man's bluff."

Ingram wished to ask if Sidney was losing, but could not bring himself to put the question. He was sure that would be the result in the end.

Shortly after one o'clock the Amaryllis stopped for wood, but the Captain did not go below. Instead, he paced up and down the deck, thinking, and wrestling with himself. As he turned in one of his walks forward he was aware of a dark figure in the lee of the starboard stack watching

Digitized by Google

him. He strode up to the man and found it was John, the texas tender. He was on the point of speaking roughly to him for spying, when the young man began in his deferential way:

"Ah jes' wanted to speak to you, Cap'n. Of co'se it's none o' my business, an' Ah hopes yo'll 'scuse me, but that ah Mistah Drake, what yo'all think so much of, done lose a heap o' money—'deed he has, sah—an' he ain' done yet."

Ingram stared at the speaker. He could not see the black features, but he knew that the honest face was pleading for the young man down in the cabin riding so swiftly to a fall.

" 'Scuse me fo' mentionin' it," John continued, after an embarrassing pause in which Ingram was silent. He bowed himself out of the Captain's presence as though he had committed some grave fault.

" 'Fierce game,' " Ingram mused as he resumed his pacing of the deck. " 'Mistah Drake, what yo' all think so much of.' Well, whose fault is it? Not mine; I'm done with him—done with him for good and all."

As he pronounced the words with bitterness there rose again out of the cold, wet darkness two faces, the pleading eyes of Sidney's mother, and the winsome features of Miss Sally.

"Let him go to the devil," he cried fiercely, and threw out his long arm as though beating off all responsibility. "It's his affair. He is old enough to know what he is doing. If he will throw him-

Digitized by Google

self away in spite of everything, let him—I'm done."

He strode back to the stern, where he stood for some time listening to the patter of the wheel buckets, as they churned the water into foam. In the darkness and the silence of the night the great, whirling wheel seemed more terrible than in the daylight. He liked to look at it, toiling like some huge monster to push the boat up the river. Illuminating the dial of his watch by the coal on his cigar, he counted the revolutions.

"Eighteen a minute," he mused, slipping the watch into his pocket. "Ought to be twenty—firemen using too much of that green wood."

He was turning from the fascinating scene with the intention of telling the engineer to use better fuel, when his quick ear caught an unusual sound, and like the mother whose watchful care prompts a quick response to the first cry of a fretful child, his attention was instantly arrested. Placing one hand on the brace running athwartships between the after hog-chains, he stooped down beside the fire-barrel amidships to get a better hearing. The jarring sound might come from a loose bucket, damaged by a drift log, or it might be due to something more serious.

So intent was he in trying to discover the cause of the noise in the wheel that he did not notice the sound of rapid steps hurrying toward him. Not until a man had crept under the brace, and stood with his body leaning out over the edge of the

Digitized by Google

deck ready to drop to instant destruction, was the Captain aware of his presence.

"Suicide," was Ingram's thought, as the shadowy form became visible in the faint light. To think quickly in emergencies, and to act with decision, had become second nature with him. A quick spring, and he had the fellow's arms just as he let go of the brace.

The Captain was a strong man naturally, and his muscles were now backed by a grim determination, yet he could do no more than maintain his hold on the struggling, squirming, would-be suicide. There was no danger of his being pulled overboard—the breast-high brace was between them—but it seemed equally impossible to draw the fellow back.

Desperately did the man struggle to free himself; more desperately did Ingram maintain his hold. Neither uttered a word. The Captain did not wish to add to the other's humiliation by calling for help, thus advertising his attempt at self-destruction; and the man had centered his whole attention upon breaking the hold of his captor. But having his back toward Ingram he could do nothing but squirm and wriggle. He could not break Ingram's hold, and the Captain could not lift him over the brace.

Beneath them the great wheel roared for its victim, and threw spray in his face, as though laving him for the swallowing. The pilot blew for a landing, and the captain of the watch could

Digitized by Google

be heard calling out his drowsy men. Soon more people would be astir and some one might happen upon them.

After a brief rest, and very careful manœuvering, the Captain finally succeeded in getting such a firm grip that he was able to hold the man an instant with his right hand, while with his left he reached under the brace and got a new hold. In a moment more he had landed the would-be suicide on the deck. The fellow lay on his face, and made no attempt to rise. Ingram turned him over and discovered that he had saved—Sidney.

Digitized by Google

Chapter XIII.

AN UNCONVENTIONAL KINDNESS

When Captain Ingram discovered the identity of the man whom he had with such difficulty rescued from self-destruction, a revulsion of feeling came over him. Sidney, lying on his back and panting for breath, looked sullenly up at his rescuer; Ingram, also exhausted by the severe exertion, gazed down at the young man. The light was not sufficient for either to distinguish the features of the other, but the recognition was mutual.

On the face of one was a look of self-abasement, hopelessness, despair; on the other, pity, mingled with contempt. Neither spoke.

Presently, as the strength returned to his body, Ingram was seized of a mighty anger; not the wild, unreasoning passion that blindly slays an opponent, but a righteous indignation that is appeased only by inflicting bodily pain upon its object—a feeling akin to that of a distracted parent over an incorrigible child. It would have been easy to hurl the helpless man to the destruction from which he had just rescued him—indeed, he had but to take himself away, and the man would throw himself into the wheel—but that was not what his outraged feelings craved;

Digitized by Google

he had an uncontrollable desire to inflict bodily pain.

Seizing Sidney by the shoulders he beat him violently against the deck, striking his head with sharp concussions. The victim did not offer any resistance; his efforts would have been unavailing had he tried, for the Captain was the larger and stronger man, and had the advantage of position. This violent physical exertion was soothing to Ingram's seething brain. From beating the young man's head against the deck, he fell to striking his face with his open palm, first on one side and then on the other, as an angry mother boxes a child's ears. He struck with such force that he felt a tingling in the ends of his fingers.

Still the victim offered no protest, and made no sound; but gazed up silently at the dim form of the enraged man above him.

Suddenly Ingram sprang to his feet, and seizing Sidney by one arm and one leg, swung him out over the wheel, shaking the helpless fellow as a terrier shakes a rat; but he did not let go his hold. That impulse past, he drew him back over the brace, and plunged the unresisting form head foremost into the fire-barrel, splashing the stale water in all directions. He did not hold him there long enough to drown him; and even had he done so, the renewed pommelling that followed when he threw him to the deck would have served to revive him.

This violent physical exertion soon had the

Digitized by Google

effect of clearing Ingram's brain. Contempt yielded slowly to pity; hate was overborne by love. He paused for breath. For a time the two men looked silently into each other's face through the dark mist, and then Ingram spoke, spoke not so much in anger as in despair:

"My God, Sidney, what shall I do with you? You're the damnedest fool living. With everything to make a man happy, mother, sweetheart, friends, health, good looks—yet you deliberately throw them all away. What shall I do with you?"

Sidney was silent. His brain was clear now; the severe punishment, and the sousing in the water-barrel, had overcome the effects of the whiskey, as well as the excitement of the game that had swallowed up his money. He was thinking. He had at that moment a clearer conception of his real nature and condition than ever before.

"Captain," he said at last, and very humbly, "you can't make it too strong." And then after a pause he exclaimed, "Beat me some more; I never had anything feel so good. Beat me some more, Captain; beat me hard."

Ingram had to smile in spite of himself; and before that smile fled the last vestige of anger.

"Come to my room," he commanded sharply, and led the way to the forward end of the texas.

Sidney presented a sorry appearance when the light was turned on. When he caught sight in

Digitized by Google

the mirror of the havoc done to his face and clothing by the heroic chastening, and by the dirty water of the fire-barrel, he joined Ingram in a laugh, exclaiming ruefully, "Captain, you sure would have made a good school-master."

"Now, see here, Sidney," Ingram began when the first impulse to laugh at his friend's ridiculous appearance had subsided, "I want to have a plain talk with you. Will you meet me halfway?"

"It's no use," the young man moaned, relapsing into deepest despondency. "There ain't any good in me—I'm just clean bad clear through. Why didn't you let me jump into that wheel?"

"Stop that," Ingram commanded. "I won't have any more of it. Talk sense."

"I tell you, Captain, there ain't any sense in my poor head—it's just plumb empty." He paused a moment, looking helplessly at the indignant face of his young friend; then, as a new sense of his degradation swept over him, he went on in a most despondent tone: "There ain't any use, Captain; you don't know how bad I am. Haven't I broken the promise made on my honor not to touch another drop of whiskey? And didn't I play cards to-night? And"—he paused a moment as though the words choked him—"and didn't I lose my last cent? What you reckon mother's going to say when she hears that? I tell you, Captain, it ain't any use—I'm no good—'cept to feed alligators."

Digitized by Google

"Oh, let up, Sidney; you make me tired. Get down to business. Simply because you think there is nothing in the world for you to live for, you want to sneak out of it, regardless of others. The trouble with you is that you're selfish."

Had Ingram accused him of any other possible fault it would not have caused such astonishment.

"Why, Captain," he protested, "generosity is about my only virtue. I hate a selfish man. That's how it comes I drink and play cards—I just can't say 'no.'"

"But I insist," Ingram continued, with marked earnestness, "that you are selfish—the most selfish man on Ouachita River; and I'll prove it."

"'Fore God—"

"Never mind; wait till I'm done. Which do you love more, Lee Darlington or your mother?"

"What a question! Lee is a good friend, and I'd do anything for him; but I'd die for mother."

"There, stop that rot; I've heard enough. You are like lots of cheap heroes"—Sidney winced at the words—"ready enough to die for somebody, or something, but very slow to live for them. If you really do love your mother so much, why did you take the whiskey on Lee's invitation, when she asked you not to?"

"The devil was in me, Captain."

"There's some more of your foolishness. Sidney, we can't shirk our responsibilities in that way. We like to lay the blame of discreditable

Digitized by Google

actions on the devil, but are quick enough to claim the credit for the good ones. What I want to do now is to show that you deliberately turned your back upon your mother to please a boon companion. You think Lee a free-hearted fellow—"

"'Deed he is; Lee's the biggest-hearted fellow I ever knew—why, Captain, he'd give the shirt off his back."

"Better say off his wife's back. Take his case; perhaps you can see yourself by looking at him. What man ever married a finer woman than Lee Darlington did?"

"You're right, there, Captain."

"And how has he treated her?"

Sidney was silent, for the home of the Darlingtons was a reproach to the race. Ingram paused a few moments to give the young man time to think, and then burst out with a passionate denunciation of his friend's conduct.

"Look at the old, rundown house," he cried, flinging out his long arm, "and its worn-out furniture—and his wife and children so shabby they are ashamed to be seen in public. And why? Remember, he's the freest-hearted man on the river"—he pronounced the words in sarcastic tones—"and if you were to ask him if he loved his wife, he would say he'd die for her. And he would; he'd die for her just as all you mushy fellows would die for somebody, but he won't live for her. He'd rather spend his money drinking and

Digitized by Google

gambling with companions no better than himself, to using it on his family. Why, man, he has spent enough at the bar on this trip to buy the whole family new suits—and goodness only knows what he lost at cards and squandered in New Orleans."

Sidney knew too well the goings-on in the City, and hung his head. Ingram leaned forward till his face was close to his friend's and said with intense earnestness:

"Lee Darlington has done for his wife just what you, Sidney Drake, would do for yours."

"'Fore God, Captain—"

"Hush, man; listen to me. Your generosity is exactly like Lee's generosity—it's no good—it's rotten! And I tell you, Sidney Drake, that the man who harbors such feelings of generosity is no gentleman."

The word came like a blow to the young man. No one had ever before intimated that he was not a gentleman without paying dearly for his temerity. But the momentary flash of anger subsided; he was too cowed to assume any artificial dignity; indeed, he began to realize in a vague, indistinct way, something of his real nature. The thought seemed to oppress him; he shrank in his clothes, his head hung forward, and he bore the air of one utterly hopeless. Neither man broke the silence for some moments; then the young planter said, in most dejected tone, and without looking up:

Digitized by Google

"I knew there was something the matter with me, but I didn't know I was such a fool—'fore God, I didn't."

"Sidney"—there was a gentleness in Ingram's voice for the first time that made his friend look up—"Sidney, your heart is all right, but your head is weak. You try to please everybody, and end in making them all unhappy—especially yourself. If you can once get it into your head that you can't do right with one person and wrong with another, without harming both, you can stand up and be a man."

"But, Captain," he protested, "I wouldn't have gone wrong this time if Miss Sally hadn't thrown me over; 'pon my honor I wouldn't."

The mention of that name made Ingram pause. He had sought to rescue Sidney; he now realized that he was rehabilitating a discredited rival, which, if he succeeded, meant the surrender of the fondest dream of his heart. What had been so simple was now complex. Again his motives were antagonistic, and his moral perceptions confused. The superior air that he had borne toward his fallen fellowman now left him; and in a moment he was as humble as the dishevelled friend before him.

"Have you quarrelled?" he asked, but without looking at Sidney.

"No; but she might just as well ask me to consider our engagement at an end—I shall do so when I see her."

Digitized by Google

"Why should she wish to break it off?" Still Ingram spoke without looking at his friend.

"Because she loves someone else better."

"Not Basel Mollison?"

Sidney shook his head. For some moments neither spoke, then he said in a tone that betrayed great effort:

"Captain, there ain't any use in you and me beating about the bush." He paused a moment to gather strength. "I have loved Miss Sally all my life, and I reckoned the world wouldn't go on if she wasn't mine, but she has found some one else who can make her happier, and so she gives her heart to him." He stopped again, as though to summon strength for a supreme effort. "I don't blame you, Captain; you've been true to me; you've been the best friend I ever had—'cepting mother—but it surely does go hard with a man to give up his sweetheart—even to a friend."

The last words were spoken slowly, and in such pathetic tones that they stirred Ingram's innermost feelings. For the first time during their long friendship he dared not look his friend in the eye.

"I don't blame you," the younger man went on sadly; "I reckon it couldn't be helped—no one could help loving Miss Sally"—he looked up at his friend with a pathetic smile, but the latter did not meet his gaze—"so when I found how the matter was, I thought I'd just take my-

Digitized by Google

self out of the way. And—and—Captain, I wish you joy; I—I—honestly wish you joy."

He held out his hand in token of sincerity. Ingram grasped the proffered hand, and his eyes were blinded with tears as he looked into the face of the man who was so weak in everyday integrity, yet so strong for a great sacrifice.

"Oh, Sidney, Sidney," he cried, "what shall I do? I have been a friend to you—till to-night. To-night when you drove me away I did turn against you. I said you could go your way and be damned—I said it, Sidney, I, your professed friend. Can you forgive me? I never failed you before. But I did fail to-night, to my everlasting shame. And had I known who it was trying to jump into the wheel, I should not have stopped you. Oh, Sidney, Sidney, what a sin I was spared! My God, what a narrow escape!"

He rushed bareheaded from the room into the cold, drizzling rain, and paced rapidly up and down the deck, muttering self-reproaches. The damp air and the exercise helped to calm him as he wrestled with himself. He took no note of his surroundings. He did not realize that the Amaryllis was rounding one of the sharpest and most dangerous bends in all that crooked river, where only the masterly skill of the pilot could avoid the overhanging trees on the point, and the treacherous snags in the bend. He saw not
'ft flashes of the headlights; he did not even
warning blast of the whistle over his

Digitized by Google

head. At that moment he was conscious of nothing in all the world but himself—his mean and despicable self.

When some degree of calmness had followed his violent outburst he returned to his room, where Sidney still sat as he had left him, staring dejectedly at the floor. As the Captain entered, the young planter looked up with the merest shadow of the old smile on his handsome features. For a time the two men sat in silence; then Ingram spoke, not in his quick, brusque, commanding way, but in deep humiliation:

"Sidney, it certainly is good for a fellow to have the conceit taken out of him once in a while. Here I have been hugging myself as the flower of all creation because I didn't steal my friend's sweetheart. And at the very time I thought myself so all-fired good, that friend had surrendered her to me. What a stupid ass I have been. But see here, Sidney, I'm not to be so easily outdone as that." He resumed something of his habitual air of self-assertion. "No word of love has passed between Miss Sally and me; you and I may be mistaken in her feelings; at most it may be a mere fancy with her, and will go as it came. You go home and go to work; behave yourself—be a man—and see if you cannot win her back. I shall do nothing till you are sure your case is hopeless."

"It's no use, Captain," the young man sighed, shaking his head despondently.

Digitized by Google

The look of abject hopelessness on Sidney's face made Ingram realize that while the young man was capable of great sacrifices as a matter of honor, he was poorly equipped for what followed; he was sadly lacking in self-control. It was clear that unless an entirely new manhood could be generated within him he would go to pieces without the support of Miss Sally.

"It's a good thing," Ingram said laughingly, hoping by changing the thought to rouse his friend, "that she doesn't know we are disposing of her heart like a bale of cotton."

"I reckon she'd have the last say," Sidney responded with more spirit, "and I know what it would be."

"Maybe not"—Ingram had lighted a fresh cigar, and as he threw himself back in the easy chair, and gazed up into the gathering clouds of smoke overhead, he resumed a philosophical air—"girls are pretty uncertain creatures, so far as I can make out; they are worse than steamboats. There's no telling how many times they change their minds before they marry—and some of them don't stop even then. Anyway, cheer up, Sidney; the game isn't out till it's played out. And say, man," he exclaimed, as though for the first time aware of Sidney's appearance, "it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to wash up and put on some dry clothes. You hardly look now like the handsomest man on Ouachita River."

As they went down to the cabin, they met

Digitized by Google

Grady who had just been called for the dog-watch.

"Beastly night, Cap'n," the mate exclaimed, by way of greeting, as he drew the collar of his coat close about his throat to keep out the cold and wet. "I'm glad the old lady isn't here to keep tab on me to-night—it'll take some mule talk to send the niggers up the slippery banks."

As the two friends parted in the cabin, they instinctively grasped hands in mute pledge of renewed friendship.

Ingram chatted a few moments with Wedgwood, who had just come off watch—the engineer was complaining of the green wood he had to put up with—and then returned to his room in the texas, where he removed his wet clothes and threw his tired body on the bed to dream of—Miss Sally.

Digitized by Google

Chapter XIV.

MRS. SEMPERFIELD IN A DILEMMA

It mattered little how much trouble Ingram had of his own, it never exempted him from sharing the trials of others; for, in addition to his rôle of commercial autocrat in his little world, he was a sort of social arbiter and all-round friendly counselor and confidant.

"Cap'n," Grady began one night as he came off watch at twelve o'clock—it had been an exceptionally hard watch, rain, mud, slippery banks, tired men, and lots of seed to carry—"it's a dog's life, this steamboating."

The Amaryllis had just left Sinope plantation, and Lewison in the pilot-house was feeling his way down stream with the aid of the headlights. The roustabouts had filed back into the deck-room for their lunch of bread and meat, with hot coffee, and the two officers stood alone on the boiler deck where they had met as the Captain came down from his room. The mate's rubber boots were smeared with the reddish-yellow mud of the last landing, and his long rubber coat and sou'wester were shedding the last of the rain in tiny rivulets. But not even this weather could quench the fire in the clear blue eyes.

"It does look that way sometimes, Mike," In-

Digitized by Google

gram responded thoughtfully, "especially when you have to get out of a warm bed at twelve o'clock on a night like this." He buttoned his coat close to his chin to keep out the dampness. "Still, I guess its largely a matter of getting used to it. You remember the story of the sailor in the storm who pitied the poor devils on shore in such a gale, where the chimney pots would be falling about their heads. Just imagine yourself a farmer now, and living up here in the woods all alone. How'd you like that?"

"But that's just it," the mate protested, "he wouldn't be alone—he'd have his family with him."

"Oh, I see; it's the family you're thinking of. Well, there may be something in that. By the way, Mike, why don't you marry?—there's no use in both of us 'wasting our sweetness on the desert air,' so to speak."

"Sometimes I do think of it," chuckled the mate in a foolish sort of way, and then added, more earnestly: "But, pshaw, it's no use thinking about it; nobody would have me."

"Oh, come, now, Mike, you're too modest; there are lots of women who would be glad of the chance."

"But my offer don't include everybody—I have some choice."

"Of course; but even so, there are plenty. There's Miss Darlington, now; she is looking for just such a likely chap as you."

Digitized by Google

"No, thank you, Cap'n; not quite so much ginger—I can supply the temper for the firm."

"Well, how would Miss Ridley—no, she's worse than Lee's sister. I have it, the Miss Williams—three in one family, and all nice girls; any man ought to be suited there."

"I'm afraid that kind likes to dress too well, and gad about. Now, I like something rather quiet and homestaying."

"Churchy?"

"Well, yes, a little; there ought to be some religion in the family, and I'm afraid I couldn't supply it. Do you know, Cap'n—now don't laugh at me, I'm serious—do you know, sometimes when I've been riled up by the niggers, and cussing like the Old Harry, I think if I had a real good wife—not too religious, you know, so she'd always be pestering me to go to church, but enough to go herself, and live up to it—I believe it would make me a better man. I don't think religion, real fair and square, up and down religion, hurts anybody, do you?"

"Not a bit, Mike. I'm sure both of us would be better off with such an anchorage as you suggest."

"Mike thinks he would like a religious wife," the Captain said, the next time he caught the mate at the officers' table.

Grady blushed furiously, and stammered protests, as he looked reproachfully at his commanding officer.

Digitized by Google

"Great idea," responded the second clerk; "lots easier to have someone else be good for you. Man and wife one, you know, so if she's pious it will give a good average, even if the husband don't score at all."

"All joking aside," Wedgwood interposed, "Mike isn't so far off. I have found that a little honest piety in a wife has a steadying influence on a man."

"Why is it, O Socrates," demanded the second clerk, turning to the engineer with mock deference, "that all religion is confined nowadays to women?"

"For the same reason," Wedgwood retorted, "that lead will float in salt water—it isn't so. Men in their first and second childhood, and those in poor health, are as religious as women. So long as a man thinks he can take care of himself he doesn't worry about the future; but when he's old, or sick, then he begins to consider the hereafter."

"But why," the clerk inquired, "shouldn't it be the same with women?"

"Women," the old engineer answered thoughtfully, "are accustomed to having some one look after them; they are bred in an atmosphere of dependence; so it's only natural for them to look outside of themselves for guidance and assistance. A strong man like the Skipper, for instance"—he nodded toward the Captain, who, having started the discussion, was content

Digitized by Google

to listen—"don't think much about the hereafter—"

"Guess you never heard him and old Mrs. Tractandprayer at it," interrupted the second clerk.

"I said 'think,' Joe; some people talk without thinking."

"Gee, that's a hot one for the Skipper!" cried the clerk gleefully.

"I was thinking of you when I spoke," Wedgwood returned.

"And I spoke—"

"Without thinking," finished the engineer, dryly.

"Children, children," admonished Mr. Disbrow, soothingly. "Now keep still a minute, Joe, and let Socrates have his say."

"Oh, it was of no consequence, I suppose," said the engineer, turning to the first clerk. "I was merely going to say that a self-dependent man like the Skipper looks to his own efforts to carry him through; whereas a weaker character, a dependent man—what you might call a womanish man—looks to Providence for assistance. But they all call on God when they get to the end of their tether."

The old man uttered the last words in a tone that for the moment silenced flippancy, and no one spoke. Grady was so thankful that the conversation had been shifted from himself, that he would not risk comment and the others seemed

Digitized by Google

too much impressed to speak. But presently the irrepressible second clerk broke out with:

"Well, I could accept the ways of Providence better if they weren't so often wrong."

"For instance?"—Wedgwood finished his inquiry with a lifting of his shaggy brows.

"Oh, I can't name them all; but 'most everything is wrong."

"Specify. What would you have had different if you had made the world?"

The clerk hesitated. He was fond of making flippant remarks about religion—though more for the sake of saying something "smart" than from a sense of irreverence—but when the old engineer began to pin him down to something specific and definite he was afraid to answer lest he make himself ridiculous.

"Well," he ventured, when he thought himself on safe ground, "you remember what a time you had with a frozen pipe that burst during the last cold snap. Wouldn't it have been just as easy for God to have made water to contract when it froze as to expand—then it wouldn't burst your pipes."

"Joe," Wedgwood began dryly, while the others pricked up their ears, "you remind me of the old raftsman who prayed God to make the river run up stream, because he had floated past his landing place while asleep."

The second clerk did not know what to make of the answer, but he finally ventured a "Well?"

Digitized by Google

"Well, you want to change the laws of nature merely to prevent some small inconvenience to a man who forgot to open the drain pipe. Now, just suppose, Joe, that you had it your way, and that water would contract when it froze. Ice floats because, owing to the expansion, it is lighter than the same bulk of water. If it contracted it would be heavier, and would sink. Under such conditions all water under low temperature would freeze to the bottom. The rivers would freeze solid, the ocean would be one piece of ice clear to the bottom, and the sun could never thaw it out. Why—"

"Hold on, Tom," the clerk cried, as the laugh went round the table, "I give up; I'll be good."

Among the first persons to board the Amaryllis when she arrived in New Orleans, were Mrs. Semperfield and her daughter. They were on the point of starting for their home in Philadelphia, the old lady said, and had come to bid the Captain good-bye. She left him a new set of tracts, and exhorted him to give them earnest consideration, promising to aid him in the search for grace with her prayers.

But the next day, instead of starting home, as had been her intention, the mother came alone to see the Captain. She was greatly wrought up over something, and demanded an immediate private interview.

"Captain Ingram," she began, as soon as they

Digitized by Google

were alone, "I demand that you discharge that blaspheming mate."

The mild eyes that met his through the old-fashioned gold-bowed spectacles were scarcely in keeping with her bold words; but her nervous manner, as betrayed by the restless fingering of the black silk bag that hung from her left wrist, showed that her feelings were deeply stirred. Ingram was at first disposed to laugh, but the look of distress on the old lady's face restrained him, and he parried by saying:

"That's rather a strange request, isn't it? Surely you can't hear him swear when you get home."

"Oh, yes I can, Captain; I shall hear him in my dreams. But that isn't all. You won't believe me I know, but that wicked, blaspheming man has had the audacity to ask for my daughter's hand."

"In marriage?" Ingram, though aware of Grady's attention to Mrs. Semperfield's daughter, had been so pre-occupied with his own affair that he could only thus express his surprise that the mate had gone so far.

"In marriage," she repeated with emphasis. "He has actually had the presumption to seek a union between himself and my daughter—my daughter, my Adelaide, who has had offers from ministers. Oh! oh! oh!" she wailed, wringing her hands in despair. "Whatever shall I do?"

"Why, Mrs. Semperfield," the Captain began

Digitized by Google

reassuringly, "I don't see that you are called upon to do anything. Your daughter needn't marry the mate if she doesn't want to."

"But that is just it, Captain. She does want to—the shameless girl. Oh, dear, dear, dear, to think that my Adelaide should sink so low as to want to marry a Godless man—a blasphemer!"

No word seemed to give the kind soul quite such exquisite anguish as "blasphemer"; it was the sum and essence of all that she abhorred. When Ingram had sufficiently mastered his own feelings he sought to calm the mother's perturbed spirit by giving Grady a good character; but this merely spread the flame without extinguishing the fire.

"But, my dear Captain Ingram," she protested, "can't you see how utterly impossible it is? It would have been bad enough had it been you"—he smiled at her unconscious rudeness—"but a mate, a Mississippi steamboat mate, a blasphemer, a—" words failed her.

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Semperfield; you musn't go on in this way. Let us look at the matter calmly."

"I have. I have prayed and prayed; but I get no light."

"Then all the more reason why we should reason together. Either your daughter is to marry Mr. Grady, or she is not. Now the question is, what can you do to prevent it?"

"Nothing—nothing; the unnatural child de-

Digitized by Google

clares she will give up her mother rather than this b—blas—"

"Excuse me," the Captain broke in soothingly, "I wish you wouldn't use that word—it reminds you so of unpleasant things. Well, granted that she is to marry him."

"But she isn't, Captain. She can't; I'd disown her."

"That would not be wise. Paul, you know, said that a man would leave father and mother for a wife; I guess it's the same with a woman."

"Oh, I didn't mean it, Captain; but what can I do? What can I do? It's driving me distracted."

"Well, let us suppose they do marry"—she raised her hands in deprecation, but he checked her words unspoken by repeating: "Let us suppose they do marry. Grady is by no means the worst man she could find. During the ten years he has been with me I have found him honest, upright and manly. For years he supported a reprobate father; he is now looking after some poor relatives—though you never would find it out from him. He is good looking, genteel in appearance, industrious, kind and faithful. What more could you ask?"

"Oh, he is good enough for a mate, I suppose, but just think of him as the husband of Adelaide—she a member of the church, and her mother and father professing Christians! What would the members think? What would our pastor

Digitized by Google

say? No, no, Captain; it cannot be, it cannot be."

Nevertheless, in spite of her protestations, Ingram, having entered into the old lady's troubles with his usual zeal, soon had a full understanding of the matter; from which it appeared that Grady had acted the part of a gentleman from the beginning, even to the point of asking the mother's permission to declare himself to the daughter, and that the father in Philadelphia had telegraphed in answer to her dispatch: "Nothing to say; settle it yourselves," and having got the full story—the mere recital of which seemed to have a soothing effect upon Mrs. Semperfield's nerves—the Captain succeeded in convincing the mother that she should under no circumstances do anything to estrange her daughter, and whatever she did do should be done only after the maturest reflection.

Doubtless it was the Captain's confident manner, rather than his words, that had the quieting and reassuring effect upon Mrs. Semperfield's troubled mind; for, strong and aggressive as the old lady was, Ingram was so much stronger and more aggressive that in spite of his comparative lack of years, she yielded to his judgment. And though to the end she still maintained in words her original contention that a Mississippi steamboat mate could never be the husband of her daughter, her manner had completely changed.

Whenever Ingram had invited, indeed, urged,

Digitized by Google

John Leeds to accept the hospitality of the Amaryllis this season, the blind pilot had answered that he would make the first trip when he was allowed to supply her with stores on credit. It thus happened that little Dorothy had been deprived of her annual excursion with "Uncle Captain." But this trip, when the invitation had been repeated, the father agreed that though his business made it impossible for him to leave the store, Dorothy should go in his stead, being impelled thereto no doubt by the fact that the child, never robust, had of late grown even slighter and more etherial. Old Dr. Sauve, the physician who looked after the health of most of the boatmen running into New Orleans, gave the proposition his most emphatic approval, saying that a change of scene and an absence from the store would be beneficial.

Dorothy, though at first inclined to refuse to go without her father, entered, when she finally acceded to his wishes, with the greatest zest into preparation for the trip.

"It is hardly necessary, Davy," Leeds said at parting, "for me to charge you to bring her safely back. You know what she is to me."

Ingram did not speak, but the grasp of his hand was more reassuring than words. Still the father, though striving to put on a brave front, seemed troubled, and confided to Mr. Disbrow, the old clerk to whom everybody took his troubles, that he feared something was going to happen.

Digitized by Google

But all forebodings were forgotten when the Amaryllis had cleared port. Impending financial ruin was ignored, and everybody strove his utmost to add to the pleasure of the little guest. Even Miss Sally, had she been aboard, would have had to take second place. The boat seemed to be officered by children; nor were the passengers, if one were to judge by their conduct, much above the kindergarten age. Indeed, the slight child, with her great, soulful eyes, and her oddities of speech, seemed to be the only mature person on board. Everybody knew her story, and every heart went out to her.

Old Molly, the chambermaid, popped corn for her on the laundry stove; Pierre, the French cook, made more kinds of cakes and sweetmeats than had ever been heard of in fairyland; and fat, jolly Stubens, the bar-keeper, saw to it that her hands and pockets were never empty of candy, nuts and fruit. The pilots enticed her into the pilot-house, Grady took her down on the forecastle, and the engineers had her in the engine-room; but next to being with "Uncle Captain," she liked best to be in the steward's store-room, and to engage Mortimer, with her droll air of importance, in a discussion of the prices of supplies.

Everybody about the boat was merry except Dorothy. That little spirit of etherial sweetness, and frail bond of the two worlds each day grew more thoughtful and serious, as though nature

Digitized by Google

were striving to mature the little life before its time.

Wedgwood was the first to speak of it—he had lost such a child himself, he said; and Disbrow, to whom he was speaking, recalled the ominous words of the blind pilot. Others apprehensively spread the idea, until, by the time it reached Ingram, it had become a fully developed conviction that the child was one of those gentle messengers sent into this world to give a foretaste of the world to come, and then quickly recalled before they have had time to become contaminated by earthly dross.

Ingram scouted the idea, to the passengers and crew; but in his own mind he was greatly disturbed, and renewed his efforts to rouse her to a greater appreciation of life. But in spite of all his efforts, and in spite of the efforts of all the others, passengers and crew, there was a perceptible weakening of the little body. The child came to care less about being out of doors, though the weather at this time was exceptionally alluring, preferring rather to sit quietly and talk with such of her friends as might be about. She clung the closer to "Uncle Captain," and had for him the most winning smiles when he took her in his arms and called her "Little Sweetheart."

The physician at Monroe, when called in, said he could detect no specific disease, but recommended quiet, and anything that would divert her mind from serious matters. Quiet they secured,

Digitized by Google

to some extent, but all efforts at diversion were fruitless, for each day she grew more and more serious. On the way down the river she became rapidly worse. She dressed as usual, but most of the day lay on her bed, talking with those who were allowed to see her. The second morning, however, she excused herself from getting up, saying there was no use in wearing clothes in bed, and adding that her shoes would soil the spread.

When the Amaryllis arrived at Baton Rouge Monday noon, the physician who had been telegraphed for from Bayou Sara came aboard. After a careful examination of the child he shook his head gravely in response to the Captain's inquiries.

"It is one of those rare cases," he said, "where science is practically helpless; the physical organs are incapable of making any response to medicine. The one thing to do is to get her to New Orleans as quickly as possible. I have often heard Dr. Sauve speak of the child, and his intimate knowledge of her nature makes him the only man who can treat her with any promise of success. Put her in his charge as quickly as possible, I say."

"Would it not be better, then," Ingram inquired, "to send her down to the city by rail?"

"No, I think she will fare better on the boat. You are too late to catch the morning train, and the evening express will not get there much before

Digitized by Google

you do. No, keep her quiet and comfortable till you can put her in the hands of Dr. Sauve. He is the only hope."

Had old Mrs. Fordham been aboard when the Amaryllis backed out from Baton Rouge, she might have felt disposed to doubt the Captain's good faith when he said he never raced steamboats. Indeed, it would have taken a stronger will than David Ingram's to have restrained the officers from doing everything possible to speed the boat to New Orleans. The engineers saw to it that steam was kept at the highest point allowed by the Government's locked safety valve—it was well that it was locked on this occasion—and the pilots made the most careful calculations in rounding bends, in order to save the maximum of distance and lose the minimum of current. Even Grady, far removed as he was from navigating the boat, contributed his mite by moving forward freight to replace what had been put off at Baton Rouge, so that the boat should still be trimmed for her best speed and handling.

But barely had the Amaryllis got to the lower end of the Reach when she encountered a heavy bank of fog rolling in from the Gulf of Mexico. This, to the highly wrought minds of the officers, was maddening. The proper as well as the usual thing to do under such circumstances was to tie up till the fog lifted, but this precaution appealed to Ingram under the present circum-

Digitized by Google

stances as little as it did to the other officers; for he was now willing to assume almost any risk if it promised to save a few minutes' time. Besides, his pilots were among the best on the river, and were as eager as he to go ahead.

It is not an uncommon thing to find men who have developed exceptional acuteness of sense in special callings. It is seen in the Hindu weaver whose sense of color is so refined that he can distinguish many shades that look alike to Europeans; it is found also among certain mechanics and scientists who acquire such delicacy of touch as to transcend the measuring instruments—Clark, the maker of the great object glass for the Lick telescope, performed the chief labor of grinding, the indispensable part, after the lens had passed the stage of mechanical measurement.

So of the Mississippi pilots. All of them of great skill, some seemed to have gone beyond the practical, and accomplished the impossible. Of such were Lewison and Henderson.

Digitized by Google

Chapter XV.

THE RUN IN THE FOG

Some wag has suggested that the great river flowing into the Gulf of Mexico was called Mississippi, or, as he would spell it, Mrs. Sippi, because of its capriciousness. Indeed, if that weakness were confined to the gentler sex, much might be found in the nature of the stream to confirm the cynic's opinion that it was of the feminine gender. Not to consider the floods in the spring, the low water in the summer, and the moving bars, shifting channel and caving banks, or any other of the thousand and one characteristics that distinguish the mighty river, the single feature of its circuitous route from Baton Rouge to the Gulf is sufficient to confirm its reputation for waywardness.

From that excellent map prepared by the Mississippi River Commission, one will see that, having safely passed the State Capital, the river makes a dash due south down Baton Rouge Reach, as though it had tired of its two-thousand-mile run from the north, and would plunge headlong into the Gulf of Mexico. But for some unknown reason the stream turned sharp about in Missouri Bend, and made a five-mile run due east, when, apparently convinced that that was

Digitized by Google

not the way to tide water, it reversed its course, and ran the same distance westward, bringing it to within two miles of its starting point.

The western course proved equally unsatisfactory. No sooner did the stream reach Plaquemine, one of those quaint, little, old French towns that carry the mind of the present-day American back to the time when Louisiana was a part of the dominion of France, than it a second time turned sharply about, and made a seven-mile dash to Point Pleasant.

Apparently the sense of direction was partially recovered at this time, for, making a turn here, the river meandered off in a sort of dazed condition toward the southwest. But the recovery was only apparent, because no sooner did it reach Bayou Goula than confusion again seized it, and a northwest course was taken as far as Hard Times, where it was within a short distance of Point Pleasant.

Perhaps this mistake in the sense of direction cleared the mind of the erratic stream somewhat, for it made a broad, easy curve to the south—but unfortunately it turned too far. Sticking a peg at Eighty-One-Mile Point, it made a frantic dash due east past Donaldsonville—another reminder of the French dominion—to Sugar House Point, where it became so befuddled that instead of turning southward, it ran due north to Point Houmas.

Such absurdly ridiculous conduct brought the

Digitized by Google

capricious stream to a momentary state of sanity. It wheeled about and made a great dash southward to College Point. But there, in front of Jefferson College, the old Catholic institution that has served boatmen so long as a landmark, and notwithstanding the fact that the latitude of New Orleans had been reached, the mighty river lost its courage, and made a sixty-mile run eastward, going sometimes northeast, and again southeast, but always easterly, till it could smell the fried garlic in the old French Market in New Orleans. That pungent odor must have addled its brain, for the sense of direction was so completely lost that a dash was made due north till it ran plump into the Place d'Armes.

A closer view of the old market, however, together with the quieting effect of the Cathedral and the Cabildo, restored its equilibrium. It again turned southward, and kept a fairly straight course during the remaining hundred miles to the Gulf of Mexico.

Whatever one might be tempted to think of this circuitous route to tide water, when that objective point could have been reached so much more quickly, it would be more charitable to attribute it to a desire to furnish man with the long strip of surpassingly fertile land, than to any giving way to pique, or, as intimated by the cynical critic, to the frowardness of the sex.

But, be that as it may, such was the fact. And it was down this kinked and twisted ribbon of

Digitized by Google

water, three-quarters of a mile wide, that the pilots of the Amaryllis were called upon to guide a large and heavily-loaded steamboat without seeing either bank. Two aids they had for the accomplishment of this seemingly impossible feat, the compass and the whistle. Knowing the course of the river at any given point, the compass enabled them to steer in the required direction until the next turn was made; and these bends were located by the echoes of the whistle that came back from banks, trees, warehouses, *et cetera.*

B-o-o-o-m, roared the great whistle on the pilot-house, and from the right bank and from the left came faint, simultaneous echoes. The Amaryllis was in mid-stream, headed southwest by south. B-o-o-o-m, and yet again b-o-o-o-m, bellowed the whistle in answer to Lewison's tread on the lever. Bye and bye his quick ear detected a more decided echo on the starboard forward quarter, which he knew came from a clump of trees at Missouri landing. The pilot rang the stopping bell, for he was nearing the head of one of the most treacherous bends on the river, strewn as it was with submerged cypress stumps —it was there that the steamer Rapides was wrecked while trying to run in the fog—and he would have to change to an easterly course. But he dared not come about till he was deep enough in the bend to clear Conrad Point on the left.

B-o-o-o-m, b-o-o-o-m, b-o-o-o-m, bellowed the

Digitized by Google

whistle, as the pilot sought the guiding echo. Exceptionally alert now was he, and doubly acute his sense of hearing. The slightiest tardiness in catching the sound might result in laying the Amaryllis beside the bones of the ill-fated Rapides.

"Listen for the echo from the willows in the bend at St. Delphine," the pilot said to Ingram in an undertone. "It should be dead ahead."

B-o-o-o-m — b-o-o-o-m — b-o-o-o-m. There! Both men detected the sound. Instantly the backing-bell was rung, and the long-stroke engines turned the great wheel back with such puffing and snorting that one might have thought the boat a conscious being in the presence of danger. By backing the stern out into the current, Lewison was able to flank her away from the dangerous shore. Though the river ran due east below Conrad Point, it was necessary to head two points north of east in order to clear the shoulder of Sardine Point.

Again the Amaryllis was underway, her engines working half-ahead. When the echo from the old warehouse at Eliza was detected, Lewison pulled her down to due east, and let her go full ahead for five minutes by the watch, blowing the whistle at frequent intervals to coax the echoes from the objects on either side of the river. Presently he heard a distinct echo that he recognized as coming from a grove of trees a mile above the head of Manchac Bend. The slow-

Digitized by Google

bell was rung, then the stopping-bell, and the ship-up-to-back. The whistle sounded at briefer intervals. Soon an isolated echo was heard dead ahead; it was from the live-oak grove at Chatworth plantation. But as the distance was still considerable, it was not necessary to back; instead, the pilot pulled his rudders hard to starboard, and allowed the boat to swing gently to the southward, the wheel rolling slowly ahead, and the whistle hunting for the echo from the live-oaks at Longwood.

"There it is," the Captain called from the hurricane deck.

Another blast from the whistle verified his words. The boat continued to wear around to the south, to the southwest, then to the west, keeping always the loudest echoes on the left to avoid the big bar under Manchac Point. Again Lewison ran full ahead for five minutes.

While the Amaryllis was wearing around the bend at Plaquemine, Ingram sent the second mate ashore in the yawl with a dispatch to John Leeds. He knew that the fog would delay his arrival in New Orleans several hours at the least, and knowing that the "Coast boats" would run in spite of the weather, he telegraphed the blind pilot to meet him with Dr. Sauve on the Magnolia. Should the dispatch be delivered in time for the men to take the evening boat it would hasten that much aid to little Dorothy.

"Uncle Captain," the child began, greeting

Digitized by Google

him with a smile as he entered her room, "do you know what the engines say?"

She had reference to the sound of the exhaust from the cylinders, to which the negroes had fitted rhythmic words for the different boats. The Captain had often laughed at her droll mimicry of the sounds that she had heard from the darkies, and from other children, but he thought to please her by feigning ignorance.

"The Amaryllis' engines say"—she tried to throw a hoarse, gutteral sound into her feeble voice—"'Y-o-u—push, and I—'ll pull; y-o-u—push, and I—'ll pull.'" she uttered the sounds in a slow cadence that kept time with the exhaust of the engines beneath them.

Ingram threw back his head with a pretense of laughing heartily. He had always found keen enjoyment in her prattle, and was now willing to do anything to please her, but it smote his heart to laugh at such a time. He laid his big hand on her feverish brow, and cautioned her to remain quiet, but she continued with an invalid's willfulness:

"The Isabella's engines say, 'Come—up, pass—by; come—up, pass—by.'" The sharp staccato sounds were supposed to represent the rapid exhaust of the Isabella, whose wheel, being small, made more than the usual number of revolutions, yet whose speed was such that most of the other boats could outrun her—hence the suggestion to the roustabout's mind.

Digitized by Google

"And the Magnolia says, 'God-bless-the-captain's-soul; God-bless-the-captain's-soul.' And the Dauphine says—"

"But, Little Sweetheart," the Captain interposed, "you shouldn't talk so much; the doctor said you were to remain perfectly still."

"But I couldn't help thinking it anyway, Uncle Captain; and if I don't say it you won't know what I'm thinking—and if you don't know what I'm thinking you might as well be miles and miles away."

"But we can see each other; I like to look at you."

"I like to look at you, too; but I want to talk. Father says the reason I talk so much is because I'm a girl; but I don't see what difference that makes, do you? Girls just have one tongue same as boys."

"I've heard," he ventured, "that girls' tongues are hung in the middle, and wag at both ends."

"I don't believe it," she protested. "Anyway, the doctor just asked to see one end."

He did not dare to cross her by commanding silence, for she was already bordering upon delirium. He could only sit helpless in the presence of impending doom.

"This is the bridal chamber, isn't it, Uncle Captain?" she asked as her eyes wandered aimlessly about the large stateroom into which she had been brought for greater comfort.

His heart smote him, for he thought of how

Digitized by Google

the negroes spoke of being the "Bride of Jesus."

"Shall we have this room when we're married?" She had always said she was going to marry the Captain when grown. Then seeing the distressed look that he could not conceal, she said: "Tell me a story, and I'll keep quiet—tell me a funny story so's I can have a real good laugh."

Funny story, indeed! He was in any mood but that. He could only think, as he gazed at the wan little face with its great eyes looking him through and through, of the grim end of all things.

"Well, one time Mr. Stebens—"

"Uncle Stebens is such a funny man," she interrupted—it was her custom to "uncle" all of her particular friends—"and his legs are so queer; but he's just as good as he can be, isn't he?"

"Well, Mr. Stebens is fond of eating—"

"I 'spose that's why he's so fat, don't you?"

"I shouldn't wonder. But, Sweetheart, if you don't keep still I can't tell my story." He laid his large palm soothingly on the little brow that seemed to be getting hotter each minute. He swallowed the lump that would come into his throat in spite of himself, and continued his laborious attempt at a story: "Mr. Stebens, you know, is very fond of green corn; he loves it so much that he will make those queer little legs of his carry that big body miles in order to get some. Well, one day last spring he heard that a planter

Digitized by Google

on Ouachita, who makes it a point to get his corn in earliest, had some ripe enough to eat, but he had only a few ears. So when we got to the landing what should Stebens do but waddle ashore to get his roasting ears. And for fear someone might see them when he came aboard, and want some, he tucked them under his vest, and held his hand at the bottom so they wouldn't slip out. Then he started to go aboard the boat; but the 'roosters' began to coongine and shook the stage so hard he 'most fell off. Of course everybody was laughing at him, and they called out all sorts of things. When he got to the span in the middle of the stage he put out his hand to steady himself, and that let the corn slip out, and it all rolled in the river."

"My, how funny!" the child cried, bringing together the thin little hands, but with a smile so pathetic and wan that it required all Ingram's self-control to restrain his tears. "Tell me another one, Uncle Captain."

At that moment they heard the whistle of a boat in the distance and as the two boats blew alternately, Dorothy declared they were talking to each other.

"Do you know what the Amaryllis' whistle says, Uncle Captain? It says, 'Wh-a-a-a-h—i-z-z-z—you?' And the other boat—I just know it's the Isabella, 'cause it sounds like her—says, 'He-a-a-a-h me.' "

As Dorothy prolonged the words used by the

Digitized by Google

roustabouts in mimicking the whistles, "Whah is you?" and "Heah me," Ingram caught up the sounds, and brought a smile to her face by repeating them in his deep bass.

The Amaryllis was now steaming down the reach above Point Pleasant. The approaching boat was the Isabella, and her business as a "Coast boat," which meant landing at nearly every plantation, explained why she crossed the river so many times. When the two boats were near enough for the exhaust to be heard Dorothy began to repeat in unison with the sounds, "C-o-m-e—up, pass—by; c-o-m-e—up, pass—by."

Gradually the sounds from the other boat came abreast, then passed astern. So the two steamers, with their precious cargoes of passengers and freight, met and parted in the fog, neither seeing the other, yet each aware of the other's identity and location.

As the afternoon wore away Ingram was consumed with impatience. The air was perfectly still; and the barometer indicated no change within twelve hours. Oh, for a breeze, he thought, to sweep away the all-enveloping fog; or, better, some power to arrest the disease that was sapping the life of little Dorothy.

The light of the long March day faded at last; the opaque whiteness became opaque blackness. But aside from the psychological influence of the idea, this made little difference to the pilot;

Digitized by Google

he could hear as well in a black fog as in a white one, and could see the same in both.

The pilots changed watch at supper-time. If it were possible to find a better pilot than Lewison it would have been Henderson; but a sense of discrimination little short of omniscience would be needed to determine which of the two was the better.

Lewison had not seen land since shortly after leaving Baton Rouge, yet when he turned the wheel over to his partner, he was able to say with perfect assurance, " We are just passing Bayou Goula."

"I thought I recognized those trees on the left," Henderson answered, meaning that he had caught a familiar sound in the echo from the willows on the tow-head. "How does she steer?"

"Like a top; Grady's got her loaded just right —you could drive tacks with her."

Lewison went down to supper. Everybody had eaten except the off-watch, and the cabin-boys were clearing the tables; but there was no sign of the usual preparations for dancing, the regular amusement of the young people in the evening. An impressive quiet prevailed everywhere. Conversation was carried on in undertones; there was no laughter; and every possible noise was avoided. Wedgwood had even muffled the bells in the engine-room, lest their frequent ringing should disturb the child.

"You did that thirty-five miles in pretty good

Digitized by Google

time," the old engineer said to the pilot, when Lewison took his seat beside him at the table.

"Yes," the pilot assented, pleased with the compliment, "fortune favored us. But sometimes I half-expected to see the old boat climbing up the bank, the way you turned on the steam when I rang full-ahead."

Wedgwood smiled. "Do you know, Guy, it seemed as though I must get that throttle wide open once in a while or I'd bust. Whenever you rang the stopping-bell, or the half-ahead, I sometimes felt I couldn't stand it. I just wanted to tear things. Of course I knew you were doing your best—and nobody could do better—but, you know, down there in the engine-room you are like a man shut up in a burning building, waiting for someone to get you out."

The old engineer paused a moment, and looked across the table at Danforth, who had finished his supper, and was now smoking as he listened idly to the conversation. For once the second clerk had no desire to break in with flippant remarks.

"Did you fellows ever think," Wedgwood resumed thoughtfully, "of the nervous strain on the men of a modern battleship in action? There they are 'way down in the hold, which is divided off into compartments like so many steel boxes, —can't see a thing of what's going on outside. Everything depends upon them, yet they don't know whether they are sinking the other ship, or

Digitized by Google

being sunk themselves—they just go ahead with their work. I remember the first time I read of how the Romans chained the galley slaves to the rowers' benches when the battle was on, I thought it was cruel to sacrifice the poor fellows that way when their boat was sunk; but, bless you, we lock five hundred or a thousand men—enough to man half a dozen galleys—in an iron box, and send them to the bottom of the ocean without a qualm. Seems to me, if I could see the enemy, and could know something about when he was likely to kill me, it would be easier on my nerves."

As he finished speaking, Ingram came from Dorothy's room, and, after making a brief statement of the child's condition, passed on out of the cabin.

"The Skipper is hard hit," Lewison observed, when the Captain was out of hearing.

"Reckon we're all of us in the same boat this time," the engineer responded gravely.

"But I never saw anyone," the pilot continued, "so idolize another's child. Of course it wouldn't be quite so bad if Leeds was here; but the Skipper keeps thinking of the blind father when he hears she is—"

"Don't say it, Guy," Wedgwood interrupted. He looked down the cabin to where the little groups of passengers were talking in whispers. Presently he pushed back his chair, exclaiming, "I don't seem to have any appetite to-night."

He got up from his half-eaten meal and moved

Digitized by Google

over to the office, where the venerable clerk was perched upon a high stool before the desk, looking absent-mindedly at a pile of bills of lading.

"What do you think of it?" Disbrow asked, as the engineer came up.

"I've given up," Wedgwood answered slowly. "From what the Skipper says, it's just like it was with my little Peg—her name was Marguerite, but we always called her Peg. She was one of those children too good for this world—I knew it when she was a little thing. You know it takes most men a whole life-time to get good enough to move on to the next place—and even then some of them move the wrong way—but once in a while a child comes into the world so much better than the law requires that it just stays here long enough to show us how good we should be—and then passes on. That's the way it was with Peg. She loved everybody, and of course everybody loved her—she was just naturally good, like Dorothy. Well, sir, when our little flower began to droop and fade—"

"Stop, for God's sake, Tom," the old clerk exclaimed in husky voice, "I can't stand it."

Ingram did not go off watch with the crew. He had no thought of sleep, and the only rest he got was in pacing the deck. Now and then he stepped into the room where faithful old Molly kept watch beside the little patient, but, as the child continued to doze, he went out into

Digitized by Google

the night again, and resumed his restless pacing of the deck.

If his dispatch from Plaquemine had reached John Leeds in time for him and Dr. Sauve to catch the Magnolia, the earliest possible relief might be expected somewhere between two and three o'clock, depending upon the speed of the two boats. He felt sure that the Magnolia would run, for, as Henderson said, it seemed as though the "Coast" pilots could run in a fog if deaf, dumb, and blind—they could tell by instinct where they were. Ingram felt that the crisis would occur at about break of day—he had often heard that people were most apt to die at that hour—and he had set his mind upon getting the doctor as much before that time as possible.

Shortly before ten o'clock Dorothy awoke, and greeted the Captain with a smile, when he entered the room. She now seemed little more than a shadow of her former self, and the great blue eyes appeared to grow larger as the little body wasted away. She talked quietly of various things for some minutes, and then said with a weary sigh:

"I feel so tired, Uncle Captain; if you'll excuse me I'll go to sleep again."

"Yes, do, Little Sweetheart"—he let his hand rest gently on her brow—"sleep will rest you. When you wake up again, perhaps your father will be here."

He dared not promise more, for fear the dis-

Digitized by Google

patch had not gone through in time. The child smiled at the mention of her father, but answered with childish prescience:

"But, Uncle Captain, when I wake up I'll be with my dear, sweet mother." She paused a few moments, while the tired lids rose and fell more and more slowly. "Tell my dear father I tried to keep awake till he got here"—the lids remained closed longer each time—"but I was—so—so—slee—p-y."

The lids dropped over the sunken eyes, and a momentary smile hovered about the delicate mouth as she dropped into a fitful slumber.

When Lewison came on watch at twelve o'clock the Amaryllis was feeling her way 'round College Point. There had been no change in the weather, the fog hung like a pall over everything, and there was still no promise of relief. The situation was too depressing for conversation, beyond a few words from Henderson as to the location. He met Ingram as he came down from the pilot-house, but the Captain could only shake his head in response to inquiries regarding Dorothy.

Bo-o-o-m, roared the great whistle on the pilot-house—how Ingram did wish it could be muffled, as Wedgwood had muffled the bells—bo-o-o-m, bo-o-o-m, bo-o-o-m; and faithfully the answering echoes were borne to the listening ears, now from this side and now from that, as the steamer crept along through the dense blackness. At the

Digitized by Google

throttle in the engine-room stood a man ready for instant action; at the wheel in the pilot-house stood another, straining every nerve in his effort to speed the boat, and yet avoid disaster. There was nothing that Ingram could do but to watch and to wait. He had all but given up hope.

By one o'clock the Captain began to listen for the sound of the Magnolia's whistle. The Amaryllis was then steaming down Grandview Reach, full-ahead; and the rhythmic motion of the boat, the clatter of the hog-chains, and the snorting exhaust of the engines contributed in some small degree to relieve the nervous tension. No whistle save that of the Amaryllis had been heard since the meeting of the Isabella. Many boats were lying at the bank waiting for the fog to lift; but none aside from Ingram's and the Coast boats ventured to run in such a fog, and at night.

As Lewison crept around Willow Bend, coaxing the tell-tale sounds from the banks, the clumps of trees, and the warehouse, Ingram thought he heard a whistle in the distance.

"Listen," he called to the pilot, and the engines were stopped. For some moments the Amaryllis drifted in silence, while the two men strained their ears to catch the sound. Presently it was repeated, but so faintly as to be almost inaudible.

"That's a whistle all right," the pilot said, when he had caught the sound.

Digitized by Google

"But it doesn't sound like the Magnolia," Ingram answered dolefully.

"Too far away, Captain—only a whisper"—Lewison rang half-ahead—"must be down below Bonnet Carre Point."

During the hour that must elapse before the two boats could meet, Ingram grew more and more impatient. He went repeatedly to Dorothy's bedside, but only to find her mumbling in her delirium, in which he caught prices of goods in the boatstore, or fond endearments of her father, and, again, attempts to repeat the rhythmic sounds of the engines. Unable to control himself there, he would rush to the upper deck in the vain hope of doing something to quicken the speed of the boat.

But there was nothing he could do. The patient labor and surpassing skill of the pilot were now the only things of any avail.

When the approaching steamer had rounded Bonnet Carre Point, both Ingram and Lewison recognized the Magnolia's whistle.

"She's making good time," the pilot observed. "Couldn't have made many landings."

"Probably skipped everything but the passengers," the Captain answered. "She can put the freight off going down—won't make more than thirty hours difference. If Bowling has Leeds and the doctor aboard, he's just the kind of a man to do that."

The good run made by the Magnolia lent some

Digitized by Google

encouragement to Ingram's hope that relief was at hand; yet he was not free from doubts. He conjured up all sorts of obstacles that might have prevented Leeds' getting the dispatch, or of his being able to get the doctor in time to catch the boat.

But despite the Captain's impatience and anxiety the two boats were steadily, though slowly, approaching each other. When they were near enough for him to hear the Magnolia's exhaust, he began to repeat Dorothy's jingling words, " 'God-bless—the Captain's s—soul; God-bless—the Captain's s—soul.' I'll bless him sure enough," he said to himself, "if he brings John and the doctor."

Louder and louder grew the whistle, as the steamer crept on in the opaque blackness, like some great monster seeking its kind. If the blind pilot and the doctor were aboard she would soon hail the Amaryllis; but she continued to blow for echoes, and to warn others of her position and course.

"Why doesn't he hail?" Ingram said impatiently to himself; "he ought to have done so long ago. Oh, it's all up; they didn't come—I know well enough they didn't come. Poor John! My God, what a blow it will be!"

At last, when he could stand it no longer, he called to the pilot, "Hail him, Guy. I must see Bowling—maybe they don't know us."

But before Lewison could obey the command,

Digitized by Google

the Magnolia sounded five short blasts of her whistle. Ingram could have shouted for joy.

Lewison answered the hail, and stopped his engines. It was the duty of the up-stream boat to do the necessary maneuvering in the delicate task of bringing them together.

"Boo-o-o-m—boo-o-o-m," called the Amaryllis.

"Boo-o-o-m—boo-o-o-m," answered the Magnolia.

And so they continued to talk. Henderson, half-dressed, came from his room in the texas, followed presently by old Mr. Disbrow and the steward. Most of the off-watch, as well as many of the passengers, had remained up to see if the blind pilot and the doctor should come.

Louder, and ever louder, grew the whistle of the approaching boat, until it seemed almost in their very presence. Then came the sound of the engine bells. Presently the faint glimmer of lights appeared, followed a few moments later by the hazy outline of the boat herself. The Amaryllis still floated with the current, like some great leviathan awaiting the approach of its mate.

Slowly and carefully—oh, so slowly and carefully—the Magnolia crept up till her bow touched the bow of the Amaryllis. And while they were thus exchanging a kiss of friendship and sympathy, two men stepped quickly from one boat to the other.

"God bless you!" Ingram called fervently to

Digitized by Google

the shadowy figure of Captain Bowling. And to the latter's "How is she?" he answered huskily, "Very low."

Already the two boats had drifted apart. The lights were quickly swallowed up in the darkness, and the whistles grew fainter and fainter as they went on their way.

Ingram hastened down to greet his new guests, the blind father whose priceless treasure was at stake, and the skilled physician who was to attempt to win back to earth the lightly tethered spirit that wavered on the point of taking its flight.

Digitized by Google

Chapter XVI.

THE DISASTER THAT BEFELL THE HERCULES

Dorothy had so far responded to the skill of the old physician by the time the Amaryllis was ready to leave port Wednesday evening, as not only to permit her removal ashore, but to warrant the hope that she would recover. This offered unspeakable relief to Ingram, who could not have loved the child more had she been his own, and his sympathetic nature was keenly alive to the ties between the blind father and his little daughter.

But, unfortunately for Ingram's peace of mind, the surmounting of one difficulty seemed merely to make way for another. As his anxiety for Dorothy grew less, his own troubles began to loom large—the unrelenting opposition of the rich boatstoreman, and, worst of all, his vain love for Miss Sally. It needed but the presence of Mrs. Semperfield to fill his cup to overflowing. And she was there. She had been unable to persuade her daughter to go north and was well-nigh distraught with what she looked upon as the girl's willfulness.

It was under these circumstances that Ingram gave what he supposed was his last negotiable note to Mercier, the cotton broker, and departed

Digitized by Google

on his final trip. Though Mercier, having seen one of the notes destroyed by Leeds, had assured the Captain that his credit was good for another, he had taken his words to be merely an expression of friendship and sympathy, and had stoutly insisted upon the terms of the original contract.

But none of his friends, or even members of the crew, guessed that the young Captain, who went about with head erect and a cheery word for everybody, carried such a heavy heart. Had they actually known that he had reached the limit of his finances, and was facing extinction as an independent boatman, only those who had occupied similar positions could have appreciated what it meant to him. To have lived that independent life, to have felt the pleasures of power, to have known the delights of pitting one's best against man and the elements, and winning—that was what he had sensed; that was what was now nearing an end. A weaker man might have yielded, and so have saved part; but not Ingram: he would have all or nothing.

Old Mr. Disbrow alone of all the crew guessed the Captain's thought as he went from hold to pilot-house examining the boat part by part. Not only was the boat his as a whole, but it was his in detail; for had she not been designed, hull, cabin and machinery by himself, and had he not personally superintended the fashioning and placing of each plank and timber, each bolt and

Digitized by Google

chain? She was his and part of him, as the child is part of the father; and, now that they must be separated, it was but yielding to a natural impulse to visit each in turn, and by laying his hands upon it, bless it for its faithful service. To him these were not mere planks and timbers, bolts and chains, but sentient things that had grown to be a very part of himself. And the separation hurt.

At Daphne plantation Miss Sally came aboard with her uncle, carrying a basket, which, with the slightest trace of diffidence, she presented to Ingram.

"Some of my little girl's cooking," the Colonel said in explanation, when she failed to say anything.

"It isn't cooking at all, uncle," she exclaimed, at last finding her tongue. "People don't cook cream cheese."

"Well, anyway," the old man protested, "it's made in the kitchen by the cook, and it's mighty good eating."

"Indeed it is," Ingram responded, heartily. He had been so absorbed in watching the play of emotions on the face of the momentarily embarrassed girl that he had been slow to grasp the drift of the conversation. "This is a case," he continued, looking down into her eyes so intently that the color came again to her cheeks, "where we are wholly in the hands of our friends; and as few of them along the river keep cows, and still

Digitized by Google

fewer think of us poor fellows living on condensed milk, you can imagine how much I appreciate this."

He raised the cover of the basket as he spoke, and turned back the corner of the napkin, disclosing a dish of the snow-white delicacy, and beside it a mug of rich cream.

"Eyes off," he cried, clapping down the cover as Lewison peeped in. "The Skipper is going to have his meals served in his room till this basket is empty."

All of which made the girl's face glow with pleasure, as of a child who has learned a new accomplishment, and receives the praise of its parent.

"How comes it," the pilot asked, turning to her, "you never brought us any cream cheese before?"

"Hear the man," Ingram cried. "'Us,' indeed; this is a case of big 'I,' I'd have you understand," and he hugged the basket as though fearing someone might take it from him.

"They give hogs sour milk, Captain, not cream cheese," Lewison protested.

"And who eats soft-boiled eggs?" Miss Sally inquired with a mischievous twinkle.

"Ah," the pilot cried, coloring, while the others laughed at his embarrassment, "only my enemies remember that sad incident. But tell me, Miss Sally, how comes it we never had cream cheese before?"

Digitized by Google

"I reckon," the Colonel spoke up, "it's because she has just learned how to make it."

"And she wants to try it on a dog," Ingram put in.

"No," said Lewison, seeing an opening where he could return the thrust about the soft-boiled eggs, "she has learned that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

"La, Mr. Lewison," the girl cried, "you don't reckon Captain Ingram has a heart, do you?"

She had little idea of how much it cost him to join in the laugh that followed. But he was relieved from further embarrassment by the ringing of the "ready bell."

"Next trip," the girl said at parting, "I'm going down to New Orleans with you."

"I very much fear," he answered soberly, for it was with a pang that he said it, "there won't be any 'next trip.'"

"Why, Captain Ingram!"—she opened her eyes wide in astonishment, and then smiled with an assurance calculated to remove all doubt—"of course there will; you'll make another trip for me, I know."

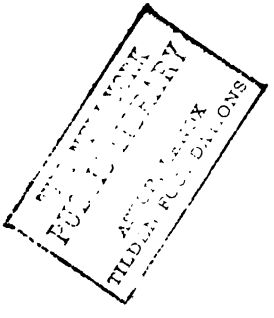
She left him with that bewitching smile lingering in his memory, and wondering how he could possibly raise funds to make that "next trip."

Sidney did not put in an appearance when the Amaryllis landed at Penelope plantation. Mrs. Drake, instead, came aboard to see the Captain, and to tell him of the most wonderful things that

Digitized by Google

It did me a world of good to see Sidney put his hand to the plow.

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

had happened since she had last seen him, closing with an animated account of how her son had gone into the swamp with the men to get out pipe-staves, where he lived and worked "just like one of the hands."

"And who fixed the landing?" Ingram inquired, espying the graded roadway from the top of the bank to the river's edge.

"Sidney," she cried with bubbling enthusiasm that was beautiful to see. "The dear boy said to me: 'Mother, I'm going to fix that landing before I do another thing—I'm ashamed to look Captain Ingram in the face when he stops here.' And he did. He got a couple of hands to help him, and they plowed and scraped like good fellows all one day. And don't you know, Captain"—her face was suffused with a glow of happiness as she spoke—"it did me a world of good to see Sidney put his hand to the plow."

"Amen," he responded with the fervor of a deacon.

"Yes, Captain," she concluded, "the dear boy hasn't been the same since he came back from the Mardi Gras trip. I can't imagine what could have come over him, but he actually wants to work."

The mother's account of Sidney's conduct gave Ingram pleasant reflections. Here was the first evidence of the young man's real determination to reform. He had really gone to work; he had repaired the landing; and he was now getting out

Digitized by Google

pipe-staves. This was something tangible. Work, the Captain held, was the only salvation of mankind; a worthy purpose, and a faithful application, these were the things, without which all the good resolutions ever uttered were vain. If, now, Sidney would stick long enough to see the benefits himself, all would be well.

A strange peace of mind came over Ingram. True, his business affairs were nearing a crisis—which at the very least meant the end of his career as commander of the Amaryllis—and Sidney's rehabilitation pointed to the loss of Miss Sally. Yet it all now appeared to him in a different light. The atmosphere had been cleared by the frank talk with his friend; and the young man's subsequent conduct showed that he was in earnest. Whatever might be the outcome of their mutual confessions, there could be no further misunderstanding.

He now looked upon Miss Sally as a legitimate prize to be striven for by himself, with the solitary qualification that Sidney should have the first refusal. Though it was still inevitable that either he or his friend must suffer sore disappointment, he felt in some indefinable way that they would come out of the affair with untarnished honor; and he believed that the disappointed suitor would have the fortitude to accept uncomplainingly what fate had assigned him.

Ingram now gave more attention to his busi-

Digitized by Google

ness affairs. Though Miss Sally's tantalizing words about the "last trip" had somewhat shaken his resolution, he still conducted matters according to his original intention. He had spent the money agreed upon between Mercier and himself at the beginning of the fight, and he had refused all outside offers of aid; it remained therefore only to decide how he should "let go," and where he should again "take hold."

He had in mind a number of plans for a new start. His reputation as a successful steamboatman was such that he already had two standing offers to go as commander of other boats on a salary, one from the Red River Company, and the other from the Vicksburg Line. Either of these would give him command of a boat as large as the Amaryllis, and an income that was not to be despised.

But in both these openings there was lacking the one thing that his nature most craved, independence. To be his own master, to command in his own right, that alone satisfied his dominating spirit. It was this reluctance to bow to another's will that caused him to entertain a third proposition, that of accepting from his father a little money that had been pressed upon him, and buying a small towboat and barges with which to engage in a purely freight-carrying business. Such a venture would not require much capital, and though it might not be quite so dignified, nor appeal so much to his vanity, as

Digitized by Google

the command of a fine passenger boat, yet it meant independence.

"My choice," Henderson said—the two men were discussing the problem in the pilot-house, while the Amaryllis made her way down the Chute behind Prophet's Island—"would be the Vicksburg Company. They are fine people, and would treat you right—probably would give you the City of Vicksburg. Then you'd have nothing to do but draw your money—no worrying about bad debts to collect, or big bills to pay."

"But," Ingram protested, "it's just that worrying, as you call it, that I like. I want to manage things, to scheme and plan—I wouldn't accept the command of the biggest boat on the river, except for the purpose of saving enough from my salary to buy one of my own."

"Want to be the whole thing, like old Mollison," the pilot ventured, banteringly.

"No," Ingram responded, soberly, "that isn't to my liking, either. I don't want to steamboat on shore. And if I'm going to run on the river myself, one boat is enough to worry over—a line commanded by a lot of captains who don't know enough to run boats of their own is merely vexation. One boat is enough for me, but I must have one."

The pilot made no comment. The water was at a stage that required great care in avoiding the bar at the mouth of the Chute, and he was feeling his way out under a slow-bell. The Cap-

Digitized by Google

tain stood behind him, silently admiring the masterly way in which he manœuvered the boat.

"Speaking of Mollison," Ingram resumed, when the Amaryllis had dodged the last reef, "reminds me that the wharfmaster at Bayou Sara said the Hercules went down two hours ahead of us with a tow of fifty barges, the largest consignment of coal ever brought out of the Ohio River."

"Gosh, that's a pile of coal, Captain!"

"Yes, it will net the old man a nice little sum. What luck!"

"Oh, well," Henderson responded dryly, "there's one consolation, he can't take his money with him when he dies—if he does it will melt."

"Great guns, how it blows!" Ingram exclaimed, abruptly, as they caught the south wind on emerging from behind the island. "This means a good shaking-up in Baton Rouge Reach. Some people complain because the Mississippi is so crooked, but when the wind blows this way, I'm glad there are so few reaches."

"It wouldn't surprise me," the pilot responded, crossing over and pulling his wheel hard to port to avoid the bar that was making down from the foot of the island, "if the Hercules had a little trouble down there—the waves are something fierce when the wind gets a fair sweep at that twelve miles of river. It's plumb in the south, too," he added, glancing at the compass.

"I don't doubt it would make short work of

Digitized by Google

her if she got in there crossways, but she'll be all right as long as she keeps her head to the wind. Do you know, Henderson, there's something impressive to me in the power of that boat; I feel like taking off my hat every time I meet her."

Ingram went down to his room to go to bed, but he had barely dozed off when the pilot called to him through the speaking tube: "Something below the Point in distress—sounds like the Hercules." The Captain was again in the pilot-house in a few moments, where he and Henderson speculated upon the probable trouble. The Amaryllis was rounding Thomas Point in the teeth of a gale of wind. To the east, some boat—they were now confident that it was the towboat Hercules—was blowing her whistle for help. From the way the waves were pounding the bow of the Amaryllis in the short piece of river at the point, it was easy to imagine what it must be in Baton Rouge Reach.

The surmise of the Captain and the pilot was correct, for when they had rounded Thomas Point they saw ahead of them, not more than a mile distant, the great towboat with her record-breaking tow, drifting with the current.

Of all places between Cairo and New Orleans for a boat to lose control of herself in a high wind, this was the worst. The river takes an easterly course from Thomas Point, as will be noted by a glance at the River Commission's map, till it

Digitized by Google

strikes Scot Bluffs, where it makes a sharp turn and runs due south for twelve miles, making the longest piece of straight river to be found on the lower Mississippi. With a gale from the south blowing against the current, swells were rolling up that reminded Anderson, the sailorman, of his voyage around the "Horn." Ingram, even from where he was, could see the great whitecaps in the bend tossing their frothy mouths like a pack of hungry wolves leaping for their prey.

"For God's sake, give me a line," the captain of the Hercules shouted, when the Amaryllis came near enough for him to make himself heard. "Broke my shaft—wrecked sure as hell if we drift into the bend."

The poor man was so overcome by the thought of the impending disaster to the great cargo of coal, that he was wholly unnerved, and paced the deck like one distraught.

Fortunately the tow was well over to the right bank when the shaft broke, for it was necessary to land on that side of the river. It took but a few moments to get a line to the Hercules, and to set the Amaryllis to backing with full steam; but it was soon apparent that she had entered upon a questionable undertaking. The immense power of the towboat had enabled her to check the fleet in mid-stream, and to swing it to port or starboard for guidance, or for landing, but when the engines of the cotton boat, large though they had seemed to Ingram, essayed the task, the

Digitized by Google

difference in the power of the two boats was brought into striking contrast.

The pilot of the Hercules continued to blow his distress signals in the hope of attracting tugs from Baton Rouge, but the gale bore the sound back.

Ingram's purpose was not to bring the tow to a dead stand, for he saw that would be impossible, but to flank it over to the bank, where a line could be run ashore. It was too late to reach Belmont landing, but he hoped to get in at Quornor.

The Hercules' crew had a line in readiness, and as soon as the after end of the fleet had swung in far enough, the yawl made for the bank. Ill fortune attended them, however, for in their excitement they fumbled and missed the first tree, and succeeded in getting a turn on another only after fifty fathoms of the precious cable had been wasted.

When finally the cry, "All fast!" came to the anxious men aboard, all eyes turned to the men handling the line. The fleet was now drifting with a speed about one-half that of the current, but even at that it was of such immense weight that it was problematical whether or not a line would hold it.

As the great hawser tightened, lifting itself clear of the water with an angry swish, men held their breath. The line creaked and groaned as it tugged at the bitts. It gnawed into the oaken timbers till the smoke arose. It was a moment

Digitized by Google

of keen suspense. Everything depended upon the man paying out the line. If he allowed it to run too freely, it might give out before the headway of the fleet was stopped. If he kept it too tight, it would be broken.

The latter event was what did happen. Whether it was due to lack of experience—which was improbable—or the general excitement incident to the peril of the situation, the checking was a trifle too short; and when the fleet had come almost to a stand, and the spectators had begun to breathe again, the line parted.

"Get out the new hawser, Mike," Ingram called down to Grady, "and stand by to make fast at Viola."

David Ingram had a number of "notions" that excited comment, and sometimes furnished amusement, among his fellow-boatmen. One of these was to have always on hand a fine hawser on the big reel under the boiler deck. Whatever else of the boat's outfit it might be necessary to skimp, he saw to it that the best line in the market was snugly stowed away for an emergency.

"Davy is a safe man to tie to," old Captain Jerry would chuckle in speaking to friends about his son's peculiarities, "because he always has along something to do the tying with, you see."

This new hawser, which had never been wet, was now run off the reel, and paid into the yawl of the Amaryllis, in readiness for making fast at

Digitized by Google

Viola Landing. The second mate had charge of the yawl, which was manned by a crew of picked men, Grady had charge of the forecastle, while Ingram remained on the hurricane deck, superintending the whole.

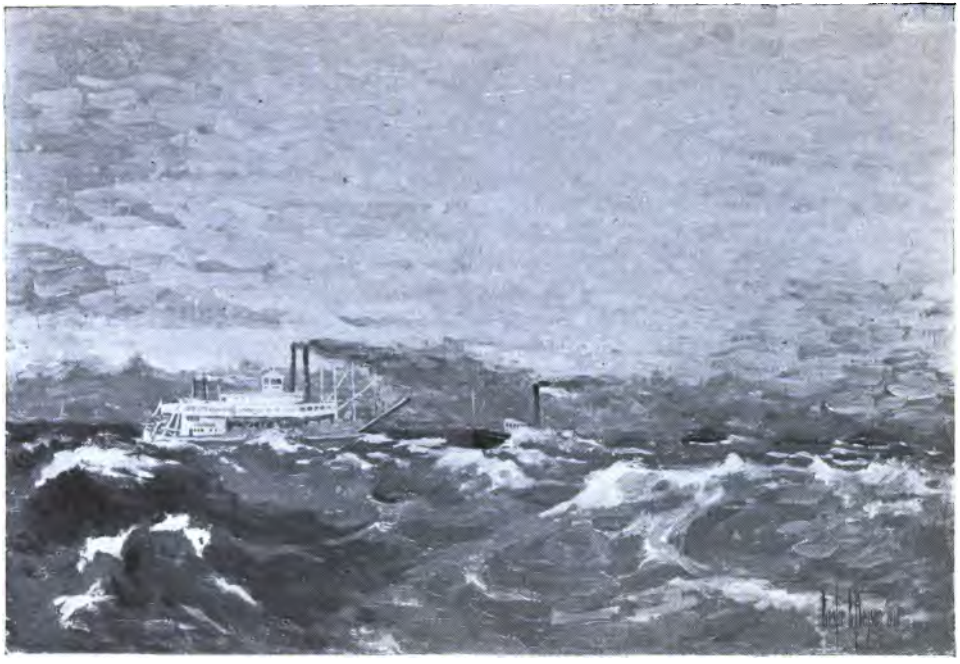
The Amaryllis snorted and puffed as she tugged her best; but despite it all the fleet gradually renewed its course toward the treacherous waves in the bend. It seemed as though the entire volume of the two thousand miles of river above, together with all its tributaries, was pushing the imperilled fleet on to destruction.

Another of Ingram's "notions" was to carry among his crew a good sailor. He must not only be a competent seaman, thoroughly familiar with lines, canvas, and the thousand and one little things known to the craft, but he must be a man of such understanding and comprehension as to be able to translate his seafaring knowledge into river knowledge in the face of all emergencies.

Such a man was Anderson, who now essayed the delicate and all-important task of checking.

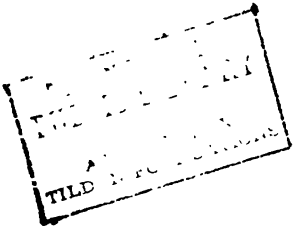
Grady's calm deliberateness might have been construed as an effort to show the "rattled" men on the Hercules how to handle lines. He stood well forward on the forecastle, engaged, as usual, in his favorite pastime of eating pecans. Anderson stood next to the bitts, equally calm, and apparently as unconcerned, but with his keen blue eyes taking in every move of the men handling

Digitized by Google



The Amaryllis snorted and puffed as she tugged her best.

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

the line. Six of the best men in the crew stood between him and the reel to assist in paying out the huge cable.

Captain Rhueford of the Hercules had completely lost his head when his own cable had parted, and now paced up and down the deck of his boat, cursing his luck, and calling upon Ingram to save him. The Captain of the Amaryllis stood with one foot on the forward rail, his cap pushed back on his head, carefully surveying the scene, and paying not the slightest heed to his panic-stricken fellow-captain. He had several additional lines run to the towboat, in order that there might be no possibility of breaking loose from her when the checking should begin.

When just above Viola Landing, the Captain nodded to the second mate, the latter cried, "Give way!" to his men, and the yawl shot shoreward. The huge coil of rope in the stern of the boat dwindled rapidly as the little craft sped on, but there was ample left to reach the big sycamore when the bank was reached. A moment more the impatient onlookers waited while the crew of the yawl scrambled up the bank, and took a round-turn about the tree.

"All fast!" came the faint cry from the second mate.

"Take-to!" followed crisply from Grady.

Anderson, who already had the line under the port side of the bitts, now threw a turn over the opposite horn, and back around the head.

Digitized by Google

The problem that now confronted Ingram was not merely to stop the fleet, but to land it without wrecking any of the frail shells—for coal barges, or "shells," are not fashioned after the manner of an Arctic exploring ship. Thus, while the fleet had the momentum of an ice-floe, the resisting power of the barges was little more than that of a yawl. And not only had he the current to contend with, which alone more than equaled the power of the Amaryllis, but the wind as well.

As the great mass of slowly-moving coal grazed the shore at Viola Landing, the new hawser began to tighten, till with a swish it leaped free of the water.

Now came into play the skill of the "sailor-man." It was his to know—not through the present senses experimentally, but simply know—the amount of strain the line could stand, and the rate of paying out in order to maintain the maximum of resistance without parting it.

It was an anxious moment. Viola was the last landing above the treacherous bend. To fail here meant the loss of the fleet. All eyes were centered on the blue-eyed Swede on the fore-castle.

The great line curled in and out between the bitt-heads, crept over the starboard horn, then under the port, and passed over the side of the boat. A deckhand drenched the bitts with water to prevent the intense friction from burning the rope. As fathom after fathom was drawn

Digitized by Google

through the hands of the reluctant Anderson, the heavy strain drew the line down to two-thirds its normal size—to the anxious spectators looking out along the taut cable it seemed no larger than a shoestring. The four lines holding the Amaryllis to the tow creaked and strained at the side cavels.

Slower and slower went the tow; tighter and tighter grew the line. The wasting fathoms dwindled to feet, the feet to inches—and then stopped.

But the current had not yet yielded. For an instant there was a pause, and then with an effort that made the steamer tremble from stem to stern, the line snatched another foot from Anderson. Again it stopped, quivering like a fiddle-string.

Ingram leaned forward apprehensively. Grady paused midway in the act of splitting a pecan with his penknife. Each knew that a caution or command to the man at the bitts was useless, nay, dangerous; since he, and he only, could know the strain on the line in his hands.

Again the line started and stopped; and yet, again, taking each time a little less. The end of the cable was already off the reel and creeping toward Anderson, and there was no other line aboard of equal strength that could be bent on.

The pauses became longer, and the loss of line less, till at last Anderson threw an extra turn over the bitts. Everybody waited breathlessly

Digitized by Google

to see if the elements had really and finally yielded.

The line had taken its last inch; the great, record-breaking fleet, together with its costly, but helpless towboat, was safely moored to the bank.

"Not a bad day's work," old Mr. Disbrow, his face beaming in triumph, said to the thoughtful Ingram, when the Amaryllis had cast off her lines, and was again underway. The two men were standing on the boiler deck near the forward rail, whence the Captain was gazing apprehensively at the whitecaps rolling up the long reach ahead.

"Yes," Ingram answered presently, "it was a fortunate stroke on our part."

"Clearest case of salvage that ever went before a court."

"I wasn't thinking of salvage," the Captain returned, thoughtfully. "It appalls me to see valuable property destroyed. I think of the men and women who have toiled to create it, who have in a sense put their lives into it; and when it sinks or burns, it seems as though that much of their lives had been destroyed."

"That's true," the older man admitted, though still unable to restrain his feeling of elation, "but we mustn't lose sight of the fact that the owner of that fleet has been doing his best to destroy you."

"Great guns, what waves!" Ingram exclaimed,

Digitized by Google

apparently not heeding the remark of his friend. "If the Amaryllis wasn't one of the best boats that ever came from Ed. Howard's yard, I'd hesitate about letting her face it."

"It's the clearest case on record, Captain," the old man continued, unwilling to drop the theme. "No living man would question the fact. No court would hesitate a moment to allow your claim. God isn't always behind the man with the longest purse"—it was natural that Disbrow, accustomed to formalities, should use the expression—"and no man is too high to be plucked down when he is ripe—or rotten."

The kindly-natured old man, who for months had been paying out Ingram's few and hard-earned dollars to defray the expense of a losing fight, and had looked forward to his financial ruin, could not now restrain his jubilation over the turn of events.

"That outfit," he continued, "is worth three hundred thousand dollars if it's worth a cent. One-third for salvage will give you enough to pound some sense into the old skinflint's head—and what tickles me is the fact that he's got to pay for his own medicine. Like the nigger's coon trap, you cotch him a-comin' and a-gwin'."

Ingram was silent. There was a far-away look in his deep-set eyes, as they rested on the long stretch of turbulent, wind-tossed water before them. Presently he turned to the old man at his side and inquired, "Do you suppose it would

Digitized by Google

be possible to get the crew to waive their claim to the salvage money?"

"Well I should say so"—the clerk seemed to throw his two hundred pounds of avoirdupois into the words by way of emphasis. "Leave that to me. Why, Captain, do you think for a moment there is a man on this boat who would touch a cent of that money after the fight you have put up? I tell you, sir, this is nothing less than divine interposition—never was a clearer case. The Lord has delivered the enemy into your hand."

"I hope," the Captain answered, thoughtfully, "I shall not abuse my power."

And again there came into the deep-set eyes that far-away look.

The New Orleans papers of the next morning contained long accounts of the accident to the Hercules, and of the service rendered by the Amaryllis. Great praise was given the crew of the latter boat for the way in which they had acquitted themselves. And although there was a studied effort on the part of the reporters to appear impartial, it was manifest from some of the accounts that the writers took secret satisfaction in chronicling the discomfiture of the old boatstoreman, and the corresponding advantage of the independent boatman. No one placed the value of the boat and cargo at less than three hundred thousand dollars, and some went as high as four hundred thousand. Nor did any one doubt that the courts would allow the usual one-

Digitized by Google

third for salvage. And all realized what such a sum would mean to a man in Ingram's position.

It was one of these quips in the river column that John Leeds' clerk came upon while reading the morning paper to the pilot:

"None are so blind as those who will not see."

Digitized by Google

Chapter XVII.

DAVID'S MOTHER WORRIES

No one of all David Ingram's friends rejoiced more over his good fortune than did John Leeds. That honest man's heart, already full to overflowing at the favorable turn in Dorothy's disease, was now ready to burst with gladness. Not that he had felt spiteful or vindictive toward Henri Mollison, or wished him any harm—he did not consider the matter from that point of view—he was simply glad on account of his friend and champion. His first impluse was to close the store for the day, in honor of the event, but realizing the inconvenience this would cause his customers, he finally compromised by taking all his clerks and their wives to the French Opera in the evening.

But neither this nor anything else prevented his being at the wharf with old "Cap'n Jerry" to greet the in-coming Amaryllis. It was a beautiful yet pathetic sight to see those two eager men, the blind led by the halt, scramble aboard as soon as the stage was down to congratulate their Captain. What words of praise they showered upon him! How they shook his hands—the father holding the right hand, and the blind pilot the left—till other friends brushed them aside in the general spirit of rejoicing!

Digitized by Google

Ingram responded cordially, though modestly, to these expressions of good will; but at the first opportunity he slipped out of the crowd of enthusiastic admirers, and hastened up to Carrollton to see his mother and little Dorothy, for Leeds occupied a small cottage next door to the Ingrams.

"Davy, oh, Davy," the mother cried, throwing her enfeebled arms about her stalwart son in an ecstasy of delight, "I'm so glad the marshal won't get the Amaryllis! My rheumatism is better already. I feel 'most like walking down to see her. The dear boat! The beautiful boat! Oh, I'm so glad, so glad!" She held him at arm's length, as though she would see in his kind eyes both her son and his boat.

"Mother," he protested, but with brimming eyes, "I didn't suppose you could be so vindictive."

For answer she drew his head down and kissed him again.

In the evening John Leeds took dinner with the Ingrams, as was the custom when David was at home, and Dorothy was brought over in the strong but gentle arms of her Uncle Captain, and made comfortable in his mother's wheel-chair. The child was still too weak to participate in the enthusiasm of the occasion, but the look of quiet joy in her eyes showed how much she appreciated it all.

"I always did hear," Mrs. Ingram said to the

Digitized by Google

pilot, "that mothers thought more of their grandchildren than of their own; and I do believe it's so, for I never loved any of our own boats as much as I do the Amaryllis—unless it was the Sylph. We were living at Paducah then, and Jerry-boy was running that little boat from there to Louisville. I suppose she wasn't much of a boat," she added, apologetically, "but it was our first, and you know the first child always seems different—the first and the last."

"How about when you have only one?" David inquired, teasingly.

"Oh, he's different every way," she answered, fondly.

"But tell us about your first," the son said. He never tired of hearing his mother talk of her early life in that long ago time.

"I was just a-thinking," she murmured reminiscently. "My, my, how it all comes back! I was getting supper when it happened"—she had reference to the disaster that befell the little steamer—"and had just put the dumplings in the oven—Jerry-boy always did dote on dumplings—when in runs Jimmy Dodd—Mrs. Dodd was a widow with three children, two girls and a boy—the oldest was Jimmy—and he cries: 'Oh, Mrs. Ingram, the Sylph's blew up!' and out he runs before you could say 'Scat.' Why, if you'll believe it, Mr. Leeds, I was that flustered I let the potatoes boil dry—and I hadn't burned a potato since we were married, had I, Jerry-boy?"

Digitized by Google

"I don't just remember about the potatoes, Mary," the husband answered, dropping into his wife's reminiscent mood, and taking up the thread of the story, which she was too apt to entangle with domestic matters, "but I tell you, John, the Sylph was one of the prettiest little two-boiler boats you ever see. And run? Why, a scared deer was nowhere to that boat. We did keep her pretty hot, I'll admit, but there wa'n't any danger if the fool engineer had only watched the water in his boilers. You know I always did hold that it isn't high steam, but low water that blows up boilers; but I couldn't get that into some engineers' heads. Jake Downing was first engineer on the Sylph, and he was so anxious to see his girl—he was courting that young widow, you remember, Mary—"

"Yes, I know; she lost her husband when the Ada White sunk on the Falls, and Mrs.—"

"Well, Downing," broke in the husband, rescuing his favorite story, and turning to Leeds, "was thinking about his girl, and forgot the water; and first thing we knew we were scattered all over creation. Gosh, John, I can feel the air whizzing through my hair yet, when I think of it. We were just rounding to at Paducah landing—I was forward on the hurricane deck; and when I lit I was within twenty feet of the shore—just enough water to break the fall, and not enough to drown me—never got a scratch, but I had to pay a jeweler six bits to clean my watch—and

Digitized by Google

I'd just had it cleaned a week before. Strange how a fellow's luck will run."

"Weren't many hurt?" Leeds made the inquiry in a tone intended to express sympathy for the owner, and at the same time belittle the casualty list—John never forgot that, no matter how often he heard the story.

David had turned his attention to Dorothy at his side, plying her with all sorts of things to tempt her appetite, while his mother tried to attend to the child and follow the story, too.

"No," Captain Jerry answered, thoughtfully, "Twelve—counting the two niggers. It wasn't what you might call a bad accident for those days —nothing like it might have been if the boilers had let go the time we had the Sunday School excursion aboard. And the funniest thing about it was that Jake didn't get to see his girl after all."

"Poor thing," Mrs. Ingram exclaimed, turning from fixing some baked potato on Dorothy's plate, and referring to the widow, "that was the second husband she'd lost on steamboats."

"Why, mother," David laughed, "how could she lose two husbands when she had only been married once?"

"Well, my son," she answered with as much assurance as David himself could assume in a crisis, "if ever you fall in love, you'll know it's just as bad to lose a sweetheart before you're married as afterwards—maybe worse—for then

Digitized by Google

you know all the good there is in her, and none of the bad."

The three men laughed and the old lady looked archly at Dorothy, who tried to laugh, too, out of sympathy, but was not yet strong enough to do anything with spirit. A hearty guffaw from behind him caused David to look around.

"Why, hello, Betty," he cried, apparently for the first time noticing the servant, "how are you?"

"Jes' middlin' po'ly, Cap'n Davy," she answered, dropping him a courtesy, and instantly putting on a doleful look.

"Don't want to go back on the river?" he inquired.

"No, sah; I reckon I'z too old to be a chambah-maid any mo', an' I has a mizzery in my braist—I reckon I'z got hawt disease."

"That's too bad, Betty; why don't you take something for it?"

"There, there, son," the father broke in, "don't you meddle. It's all Betty can do to keep sober with taking her last prescription—another one and she'd see snakes in her shoes."

The old negro woman, though but partly appreciating the joke, joined in the laugh. When the fish was served David thought to compliment her by saying:

"Betty, I think I'll have to take you out as cook. I don't believe Pierre himself could equal this pompano."

She looked at him a moment to see if he was in

Digitized by Google

earnest—for Pierre was one of the best French cooks running out of the port of New Orleans—and divining from the way the fish disappeared that he was, her face broke into a smile that made the dark and wrinkled, though kindly features, pleasant to look upon.

"Come, come, Davy," the father spoke up with assumed severity, "don't be putting ideas into Betty's head; it's all we can do to live with her now."

The old woman threw back her head with a laugh. "I don't reckon I'd mind bein' cook," she said, "if I had all them niggahs to do the wo'k like Pieah—leastaways if I didn't have no hawt disease."

"Oh, come, Betty," the elder Ingram exclaimed, "give us a rest on the 'hawt disease.' You've had that 'mizzery' in your 'braist' for the last fifty years, to my certain knowledge. If you wait to die of heart disease, you'll live to see the Mississippi run dry."

"Yas, sah," she responded, uncertain from his sober face whether or not to take his words as a rebuke. "I know's I'z powerful strong, an' I reckon if I have something to take when the mizzery begins, it won't git me—yas, sah, I reckon it won't."

Her erect figure and firm step as she passed from the room might well have been the envy of a woman forty years younger.

"We had a call," the father said, addressing

Digitized by Google

his son, "from some friends of yours, Mrs. Semperfield and her daughter."

"And what did you think of her?" David inquired, turning to his mother. "Did she try to convert you? Come, now, mother," he went on, without waiting for her answer, "this is a chance for you to reform, before you settle down into fixed habits. Great old lady, isn't she?"

"Well," Mrs. Ingram sighed, "I'd just like to see her husband, that's all I've got to say." And the men laughed immoderately at the delicate innuendo.

"How about Miss Adelaide?" the son inquired. "How would she strike you as a daughter-in-law?" That was David's way of speaking of young ladies to his mother.

Mrs. Ingram gave her son a quick, searching glance to see if there was any special meaning in his words, and then answered with a sigh: "Anyone will suit me that suits you, Davy."

Much amusement was afforded the little company by the introduction of this topic. The pilot insisted that no more fitting observance of their good fortune could be found than the marriage of the young Captain. Mrs. Ingram bemoaned her fate — more than half-seriously, too — that she should go down to her grave grandchildless. While "Jerry-boy" expressed doubt as to whether a man could command a steamboat and serve a wife at the same time without slighting the one or the other; and he convulsed his audi-

Digitized by Google

tors by quoting the strange words of that pioneer steamboat builder, John Fitch, who, at the end of his disappointed life, said, "I know of nothing so perplexing and vexatious to a man of feeling as a turbulent wife and steamboat building."

Dorothy for the most part was silent, her big blue eyes resting seriously upon the face of each speaker in turn, until toward the end, when she exclaimed:

"You folks needn't worry about Uncle Captain. I'm going to be his wife when I'm grown up." At which they laughed, more because of her serious manner than the words, and declared he could not do better.

"By the way, Davy," the father said, suddenly, "how is our young friend, the Colonel's niece? You haven't told us about her."

The quick change in David's manner, as he answered the questions plied him regarding Miss Sally, caused his mother to watch him narrowly, and prompted her to remark to her husband when they were alone that night, "Oh, Jerry-boy, I do hope Davy won't marry Miss Heath—she never, never could appreciate him."

"Well, well, Mary," the old man exclaimed, "I never did see such a croaker." He encircled her waist with his long arm, and lifting her chin, looked down into the gentle eyes, moist with tears. "Here you've been worrying yourself 'most sick over the fight, and now that that's

Digitized by Google

practically ended, you begin to worry about Davy's marrying Miss Sally. Why, she's engaged to Sidney Drake—has been ever since they were children. Davy didn't say he was going to marry her."

"Of course he didn't say so; but I haven't lived with his father fifty years for nothing. He's too honest to hide anything. But then, I suppose it must be somebody"—she sighed. "Only I do wish it was somebody else."

"Yes, yes, that's the way; no mother ever thinks a wife good enough for her son. I suppose that's what my mother thought when I picked you out, Mary."

"M'm! Much picking you did. If I hadn't taken matters into my own hands you'd 'a' been gobbled up by that little chit, Bessie Burnside, before you knew it. Picking, indeed!"

Digitized by Google

Chapter XVIII.

INGRAM MYSTIFIES HIS FRIENDS

Thursday, the day after the Amaryllis had left port, old Captain Jerry hobbled into the boatstore on Levee Street, just above Canal, and entered the office of John Leeds. The two men clasped hands in silence, the venerable commander looking eagerly into the face of the pilot, the latter rolling his sightless orbs as though trying to get from behind some obscuring object.

"I can't quite make it out, Captain," the blind man said.

"He's lost his head," the old boatman responded, with great emphasis.

"Most foolish thing I ever knew him to do—can't understand it at all. Why, Captain, it's the clearest case on record. Henderson told me the captain of the Hercules himself admitted he was a goner—and every living man on the river knows he was. Nothing for Davy to do but file a claim and get the money—easy as drawing it out of the bank."

"Well, I can't believe it yet," the old man groaned.

"No more did I," said Leeds; "when I saw it in the paper this morning; and I posted off down town without waiting to see you at the house—I

Digitized by Google

knew how you'd feel about it. But the records of the court prove it—not a sign of a claim filed by Davy."

"Maybe Mollison has settled with him." The father uttered the words eagerly, as though in them lay the solution of the mystery under consideration.

"No, I thought of that, and went to see his confidential man—Granville has always been friendly to me 'spite of the old man—and he says Mollison is wondering what Ingram is up to. Besides, the Whistler went out as usual last night."

"Well," the venerable captain sighed, shaking his head in despair, "Davy always did have strange notions about things. I hope he isn't indulging in some of his ideas of chivalry. It wouldn't do any good to try to heap coals of fire on Henri Mollison's head—he's already seasoned for the fires to come. And Davy must remember what is due his father. You know how the old skinflint used me, John; and if my son should show him mercy I'd disown him."

David Ingram's failure to file a claim for salvage was no less puzzling to the officers of the Amaryllis than to his friends ashore.

"Looks as though the Skipper was getting nutty," commented the second clerk, at the officers' table, the evening they left town.

"It's very strange, very strange, indeed," assented old Mr. Disbrow; "I can't quite make it out myself."

Digitized by Google

"What did he say?" Wedgwood inquired, addressing the purser.

"Didn't say much of anything; just said he'd never been paid for lending a hand to a drowning man, and he didn't propose to be now."

"Thunderation!" Danforth cried. "He's the drowning man. And old Henri Mollison would sit on the bank and see him go down with out turning a hair. This breaks me all up."

"It does seem a little incredible," Disbrow admitted. "For months we have been running on borrowed capital, and this, so far as I know, may be the last trip this boat will make—I can't understand it."

"Nutty," Danforth repeated, tapping his forehead. "The Skipper is getting nutty. Old Mrs. Tractandprayer must pray for him."

Ingram had so many things to occupy his attention at this time that he was not aware of the wonderment of the crew over the salvage matter. Among other diverting circumstances was the presence of Mrs. Semperfield. The old lady had come aboard with her daughter at the last moment before leaving port, saying she had surrendered, or at least that she had yielded to the extent of taking another trip on the Amaryllis to see if it were possible to reconcile herself to the idea of having a Mississippi steamboat mate as a son-in-law.

It was soon evident to the crew and to Ingram that the old lady had gone a long way toward

Digitized by Google

self-reconciliation, for she treated Grady in the same motherly way as the others, and resumed in earnest her interrupted study of the steamboat roustabout. Though the Captain was the only member of the crew who knew of the peculiar relations existing between the first mate and the two lady passengers, the others suspected the truth, and were not at all backward about letting Grady know their suspicions. But the little blue-eyed Irishman, as became a good steamboatman, bore the teasing in good part.

Doubtless it was Mrs. Semperfield's interest in Grady that led to her interest in the heathen below the boiler deck. Upon former trips her naturally aristocratic nature was repelled by the men below decks. Though theoretically admitting all men to brotherhood, practically she had extended that boon to the officers only, leaving to the roustabouts such crumbs of spiritual grace as might drop from the table prepared for their superiors. But the general upheaval and overturning of ideals that had accompanied Adelaide's rebellion had materially broadened her conception of the problem. Even now, however, she could not prevail upon herself to go among the men personally—a fact admitted to Ingram in a shamefaced manner.

"Why not?" he asked. "You have been pleading for foreign missions. Here the benighted foreigner is brought to your door, and you hesitate to let him in."

Digitized by Google

"But," she protested, feebly, "these men are so coarse, and so ignorant—I feel almost afraid of them."

"Yet you would go into the remotest parts of Africa, and put yourself in the hands of wild men."

"Oh, it isn't the danger so much that I think of; it's the idea."

"Ah," the Captain exclaimed, exultingly, "you've hit the snag at last. You think it preferable to offer your body as a living sacrifice for a cannibal feast in central Africa, to humbling your spirit in the presence of your friends at home. Be honest, now. Isn't a good deal of this missionary work due largely to a craving on the part of individuals for notoriety and society's applause? Your young enthusiasts post off to the ends of the earth to carry light to the heathen, but before they can get out of their own country they must pass through a thousand miles of territory inhabited by the same race they seek to save, and just as much in need of enlightenment."

"But," she protested, determined not to be swept from the field by his impetuous charge, "we have established missions among the negroes in this country."

"True," he admitted, "but with the same prevailing idea. You go into the country districts where no one will see you, instead of trying to help the depraved of the cities and towns before the eyes of society. In all my experience here I

Digitized by Google

never have seen a white missionary approach a negro roustabout as a brother."

"But we are teaching them to read the Bible," she persisted.

"Yes, and what kind of morality can you expect an ignorant slave, a member of a despised race, to get out of the Bible? He learns how to pray, and sing, and preach, but he doesn't know how to live. Like the Indian, he is quick to learn the vices of the white race, but slow to copy its virtues. Even the education offered by the public school will not save him. He needs a working code of morals; he must be taught individual responsibility—and then he must be given an opportunity to exercise his rights. The mere ability to read and write counts for little if the heart is wrong; religion is nothing without morals."

When Ingram fell into what Wedgwood and Miss Sally called his "preaching" mood, Mrs. Semperfield was at a loss as to how she should take him. Sometimes she allowed his assumptions to go uncontradicted, at others she maintained her ground. In the present instance, she inquired, after a little hesitation:

"Captain Ingram, what have *you* done for these people?"

A peculiar smile of deprecation hovered for a moment about his mouth before he answered.

"I guess I shall have to confess to the common feeling. It is easy to preach. I'd rather preach

Digitized by Google

than anything I know of, except run a steamboat; but it's hard to practice. The spirit is willing, but, well—you know how it is—we like to tell other people what they should do." He ended with a laugh, but seeing how much in earnest she was, he went on: "But seriously, Mrs. Semperfield, I really have given a good deal of thought to this question, and have tried to do a few things. I have found the roustabout more of a man than might be supposed from outward appearances. And while he seems to lead a hard life—and doubtless it would be such to anyone else— he has become accustomed to it, and is disposed to resent outside interference.

"When I built this boat," the Captain continued—they had walked from the forecastle back on the starboard guard to the after end of the boilers as they talked—"I thought to put in practice some ideas that had long been in mind. It had always seemed a little hard to me that the roustabouts should fare as they do in the matter of personal comforts, so I had a messroom built, where the men could sit at table and eat with knives and forks like Christians."

The old lady patted his arm approvingly, and gave him the gracious look that was always evoked by the recital of good deeds.

"But do you know," he added, "those men wouldn't have it so."

"The perverse creatures." She stopped short, and looked him inquiringly in the face.

Digitized by Google

"Whether perverse or not, they wouldn't eat in the mess-room. They wanted to get down on deck where they had been accustomed to eating. The knives and forks, of course, soon disappeared—the men wouldn't bother with them."

Further comment upon this independent spirit of the roustabout was interrupted by an altercation that arose in the deck-room. They could not see the disputants, but Ingram recognized Grady's voice, and the subject matter of his angry words soon made it plain that he was scolding the cook.

"I'm not going to argue the matter," the mate was saying when they caught his words. "The Captain is paying for good grub for these men, and good grub they're going to have. If your slush cooks don't attend to business, fire 'em; and if that mess tender puts any more mouldy bread in the pan for these men, he'll go overboard."

Pierre was profuse with apologies and explanations, but in the end elicited from the angry little Irishman only the parting warning, "You've heard what I said."

"There's your 'nigger driver,'" Ingram said to his companion, as Grady passed forward on the opposite guard without seeing them. "No matter how harsh he may be with his men, he won't let anybody else abuse them."

The Amaryllis had a fair cargo of miscellaneous freight stowed in the deck-room, oats, corn, farming implements, and household sup-

Digitized by Google

plies for the plantations. Roustabouts were sitting or lying on the piles of sacks, some asleep, others lazily eyeing the Captain and his companion. Immediately aft of the boilers, where the deck was free of freight, a little knot of men were "shooting craps." But the game was carried on half-heartedly, for money was scarce on the way out, and the betting was light; but a half-dozen men idled about, laughing and joking as they watched the few who were fortunate enough to have something to lose.

"Grub-pile,—grub-pile!" shouted the mess tender from the after end of the deck-room.

Instantly the scene changed. The crap game was abandoned, the sleepers awoke, and from every direction, and out of all sorts of nooks and corners, came dusky roustabouts. When the last of them had passed, Ingram and the old lady entered the main fore and aft gangway that led through the deck-room, where a view of the men might be had without making the intrusion too apparent.

The mess tender, with the assistance of a slush cook, was serving the men as they filed in. Each man received a large tin cup filled with coffee, black, strong, and of good quality; sugar was added to suit the taste, but no milk or cream. From the huge pans steaming in a row on the rude table, his plate was filled with fresh beef, beans, and potatoes, and the whole covered with rich, brown gravy, which served in lieu of butter.

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Semperfield was particularly taken with the gravy. As each man received his tin cup and plate he helped himself from a big pan of white bread standing on the end of the table, and sauntered off to find a place among the freight where he could sit and eat.

"Captain," Mrs. Semperfield exclaimed with more spirit than he had yet seen her betray, "if it wasn't for the appearance of it I should like to eat that way once myself." And after watching the men bolt their food with great gusto for a few moments, she added: "Doesn't it make your mouth water? It reminds me of the way we ate when I was a little girl camping in the Maine woods. My, my!"

"Don't need any tonics for the appetite, do they?" he said. "After all, what can we boast in the way of enjoyment over what they have? Think of sleeping as soundly as we saw those men on the freight when we came in, and of eating with such appetites."

She remained silent for some moments, intently watching a robust negro sitting on an upturned cracker barrel, as he sopped large chunks of bread in the brown gravy, and tossed them into his cavernous mouth. It was the very picture of satisfied contentment.

"Oh, that gravy," she exclaimed, "bread and gravy—why don't we have that in the cabin? It looks so good."

"Pierre wouldn't take that as a compliment,"

Digitized by Google

Ingram laughed, "after all the fancy dishes he has prepared for the cabin tables."

"Who are those men over there?" she asked, pointing to some negroes sitting about a tin tray into which a number of dishes had been soldered, and each of which was filled with one of the kinds of food served.

"Ah, those are the aristocrats of the deck-room. They are the captains of the watch and their partners, stevedores, or inside men." As all the men had now been served, and were quietly eating in their several places about the deck-room and on the guards, the Captain and his companion walked back to where the mess tender stood behind his all but empty trays and pans.

"Men have good appetites, Lee?" Ingram inquired.

" 'Deed dey has, Cap'n," the young negro answered, his white teeth flashing as he grinned. "Dey eats so much it 'most breaks my back totin' de grub."

"Any of them want a second helping?"

"Yas, sah, some of 'em. Dat Pony"—pointing to a fine looking negro in his early prime sitting on a truck half-way up the gangway—"he eat 'nough fo' fo' men."

Ingram's amused face showed how much he enjoyed hearing the men's crude comments about each other's habits, but Mrs. Semperfield's lack of the humorous sense left her attention for more practical things. During the conversation of

Digitized by Google

Lee and the Captain she had been closely scrutinizing each of the several kinds of food, and concluded her inspection with the remark that it was "sensible and wholesome."

"Dessert?" Ingram inquired of the mess tender.

"Yas, sah; we has duff."

"Oh, is it plum-duff?" the old lady cried eagerly. "I've always wanted to see the sailor's plum-duff."

"This is the same 'plum-duff' of the story books," the Captain answered, "but as it is made here, as well as in the ship's galley, without the plums, we call is simply duff. It is more like the Yankee hasty-pudding than anything else I know of, and is served with plenty of sweet sauce."

While he was yet speaking the slush cook came out through the engine-room door bearing a huge pan, from which the steam was rising with an appetizing odor. Mrs. Semperfield confessed, when the pan had been placed on the table before them, that it looked even more inviting than the rest of the food. Ingram drew her aside out of the way of the men who now came up with empty plates. The mess tender helped each to a huge piece of the steaming duff, which he deftly scooped from the pan with a large, iron spoon, and over which he poured a quantity of sweet dressing from a big pot at his side.

A few of the men approached the mess table

Digitized by Google

with diffidence, as though conscious of being spied upon by curious visitors; some came with a rolling swagger, winking good-naturedly at the Captain, and grinning at his companion; but the greater part of them seemed to be utterly indifferent. All, however, showed their keen liking for the duff by the way they ate as soon as helped by the mess tender.

"Do they always fare as well as this, Captain?" the old lady inquired, when the last man had been served.

"What was the breakfast bill of fare, Lee?" he asked, turning to the mess tender.

"We had fresh beef, an' grits, an' soft braid, an' coffee," the young negro answered.

"Always have beef?"

"Most always—sometimes we has po'k."

"Po'k," the Captain echoed in a teasing tone, "what in the world is po'k?"

"Dat's jes' po'k—hog meat," he exclaimed, catching a distinguishing phrase.

"Oh, you mean pork; why didn't you say pork?"

"Dat's what Ah does say." And then as he caught the twinkle in Ingram's eyes, he was emboldened to add with a laugh, "Ah don't see no difference in de way Ah say po'k, an' de way yo' all says po'k."

"Well, just so you don't drop any of your 'r's in the duff, and get Grady after you. What are you going to have for supper?"

Digitized by Google

"Ah 'spects we has beef an' braid an' coffee an' allso'ts."

"What do you mean by 'allsorts'?" Ingram asked for the benefit of Mrs. Semperfield, whose curiosity was still a long way from being satisfied.

"Dat's pot-pie made f'om what's lef' f'om breakfas' an' dinnah—an' hit's pow'ful good, Cap'n," he added with a smack.

"What at midnight?"

"Col' meat, an' braid an' coffee."

"Captain Ingram," Mrs. Semperfield said as she was led out of the deck-room, "I am surprised at the food you give these men. I don't think, after all, you are quite as bad as you try to make out."

"It pays to feed them well," he answered.

"There goes your commercialism again. I do wish you wouldn't reduce everything to dollars and cents."

"Does sound brutal, doesn't it?" he admitted. "But, after all, isn't that our necessary and final test? Suppose I wish to add some comfort to these men. I find it will cost a certain amount. Now, it doesn't matter how much I'd like to do it; if the business won't stand the additional expense it must be left out. On the other hand, in economizing expenses we must be careful not to encroach upon efficiency. We could feed these men on cheaper food—some boats do—but we have found they work better when well treated;

Digitized by Google

and they are so eager to ship on this boat that the mate can hire them for less money. This, you see," he concluded, "is where enlightened selfishness comes into play."

She looked at him in silence, uncertain, apparently, whether or not to take him up on his point of ethics. Presently he added, as though anticipating her thought:

"Of course I know that a man who is honest because that is the best policy is not necessarily an honest man; but at the same time I think he is more apt to stick if he knows it is going to pay in this world as well as in the next."

Digitized by Google

Chapter XIX.

How Sidney distinguished himself at the hog-drive

Matters went surprisingly well with the first mate of the Amaryllis during his term of probation. Not only had the fine weather put everybody in good humor, but it had given dry banks at the landings, thus freeing the men of the ankle-deep mud in which they had to work during the rainy spells. The Amaryllis herself seemed to be on her good behavior, for she came into the landings so carefully that the stage dropped plumb in the roadway, and left not a shadow of an excuse for Grady to lose his temper. With good weather, freight moving smoothly, and all things propitious, it is not so much to be wondered at that the mate was able to live down in that week a goodly part of his reputation as a "blasphemer."

Adelaide sat all day on the boiler deck, reading when the second mate was on duty, and pretending to read when the first mate came on watch. It was beautiful, this loving solicitude of the heart-quickened, over-refined girl for the cruder, rougher, but more virile man, who had struck a responsive chord in her nature, and so made life worth the living. Indeed, her pride in the little Irishman and her elation over his

Digitized by Google

model deportment were plainly beginning to have their effect upon her mother, and to produce a change in the old lady's manner toward them both. Though Mrs. Semperfield's ideals had been rudely jostled, if not shattered, by the prospect of a steamboat mate as a son-in-law, yet her really honest heart could not but respond to the appeal of the sterling qualities of the man.

"Down" freight was light at this season of the year. The cotton, which constituted the major part of the boat's business, had been mostly hauled out, and the little dribs that were picked up here and there were stowed on the guards in order to make a good showing. Pipe staves, which the boats refused to take as long as full cargoes of cotton were to be had, were now moving, as also were some cattle and a good many hogs. It was this last named article of freight that all but caused Grady's downfall.

Hogs, be it known, are not raised in the lowlands of Louisiana as they are in Iowa or in New York. In the Creole state the owner brands his swine, and turns them loose in the vast, primeval swamp that borders the plantations along the navigable streams, where they thrive upon the rich mast of nuts and acorns. If he sees them again before marketing them, it will be only as he rides through the timber on a hunting or exploring trip.

These animals, left to themselves, with freedom to roam at will the vast wilderness of swamp

Digitized by Google

lands, and coming into fellowship with hogs whose careless owners never reclaim them, it is but natural that they should revert to their original wild state. The first generation's change manifests itself mostly in its fear of man. The second generation, or those hogs of the previous season that have been kept over for breeding, will not only do their utmost to escape captivity, but, when cornered, will fight. And among these older hogs are often to be found boars that have lived so long in the wild state that their sense of liberty prompts them not only to fight when on the defensive, but to attack as well.

Marketing time is generally during the latter part of the winter, when the cotton crop has been disposed of, and when the freights are light. Then it is that the planter, his season's work on the plantation done, sallies forth on his horse, accompanied by his dogs, to round up his hogs. He may have the companionship of a neighbor, or the assistance of some of the negroes on the place; and sometimes a party of young folks turn it into an occasion for merrymaking.

When the Amaryllis landed at Daphne plantation on her way up, Miss Sally and her uncle came aboard as usual, the former somewhat demure—though not a whit less fascinating to the Captain—the latter quite feeble. But it was not alone the old man's body that showed the marked change, for his mind, too, was ill at ease. In spite of his habitual kindliness it was clearly to

Digitized by Google

be seen that he was sorely troubled about something, and the solicitude for his ward, and the strange look he now and then bent upon his young friend, the Captain, left no doubt in Ingram's mind that it was the rivalry between Sidney and himself, but no word to that effect passed the old man's lips. If what he had long ago set his heart upon was not to be, if the girl whom he had cherished as his very soul, elected a different course, he would bear his disappointment in silence.

Miss Sally no sooner discovered that Adelaide was aboard the Amaryllis than she insisted that she must then and there redeem her promise to visit Daphne. The fact that the promise had been made when Miss Semperfield did not expect to be in that part of the country again for a year at the earliest, cut no figure with her impetuous friend; she was taken ashore willy-nilly. But the courteous entreaty of the uncle, added to the impulsive cordiality of the niece, was not sufficient to tempt the mother. And the old lady, for some reason best known to herself, remained with the boat.

Once on the plantation, the boat out of hearing, and all the world shut out, Miss Sally set about making the most of her friend's companionship before the Amaryllis should return from Monroe. There were the gossipings, the confidences, and the multitudinous nonsenses to which real live girls are addicted and which occupied their minds

Digitized by Google

during the greater part of their waking hours. There were also the sights of the plantation and the surrounding country to see, including the old, abandoned gin that still stood at the lower end of the place with the roof of its monster lint-room fallen in, and its huge beams, morticed and wood-pinned, naked to the elements; there were the negro quarters, or cabins, with their good-natured, pleasant-faced "mammys," and their swarms of happy children. And best of all, there was the little cabin where lived "Mammy San," a toothless old crone well past the century mark—no one knew how far—who, according to Miss Sally, could make "sure enough voodoo charms."

In the midst of these simple diversions Miss Sally received a note from Sidney inviting her and Miss Semperfield to a "hog drive." This was an unexpected opportunity for showing the stranger one of the unique features of the plantation life. Adelaide, fortunately, numbered among her very few athletic accomplishments a mastery of horses, which soon put her at ease with the little party of young folks from the neighborhood who set out under Sidney's leadership. Caleb Rosland, a young planter from the Alphena plantation, and an intimate friend of the Heaths and Drakes, escorted the "Yankee girl."

This was Sidney's first emergence from the swamps since his disastrous exploit on the Amaryllis; and although none of his companions

Digitized by Google

knew the whole truth about that adventure, or would have thought much about it if they had, his self-consciousness kept him for a time from entering fully into the spirit of the occasion. But a hard ride down the Harrisonburg road to anticipate the dogs by way of the "cut-off," caused him to forget himself; and from that time on he not only directed the movements of the party, but set the pace for the merrymaking.

"Did you ever see such a pretty match?" young Rosland said to Adelaide, indicating Sidney and Miss Sally who were riding ahead.

"Never," she assented. "I never before saw such superb riding."

Well might she say it with emphasis, for better riding horses than Turby and Whitefoot it would have been hard to find; and to have found two riders in more perfect accord with their mounts, the search would have to be far and wide. Whitefoot, a dark bay of medium size, whose small head, tapering neck, and slender legs proclaimed his breeding, had five different paces, into any one of which his skilful mistress could throw him at will, and all of which he could keep up indefinitely with the light girl on his back. Miss Sally wore a gray riding habit, but, disdaining the conventional tile, she had a broad-brimmed straw hat, which had been on her head when the party set out, but which now hung at her back, flapping in the breeze made by the cantering horses. As she turned her head now and again

Digitized by Google

to call back some bantering word, or to join in the laughter of those behind, Adelaide caught the flash of her dark eyes, and realized how thoroughly she was enjoying the sport.

Turby, Sidney's pet riding horse, was old enough to be put on his mettle by young Whitefoot, but with his adored master on his back he would have kept the pace till he dropped in his tracks. When Miss Sally threw Whitefoot into a fox-trot, Turby fox-trotted; when she changed him to a single-foot, Turby single-footed; and so on with a pace, a rack, or whatnot—there was no gait known to horseflesh that Sidney had not taught the clever animal, and into which he would not fall in imitation of his companion.

The party had gone down the Harrisonburg road in order to save a hard ride through the timber in pursuit of the dogs, whose baying could occasionally be heard farther and farther to the right, as their course diverged from the highway. At the junction of the "cut-off," Sidney led into the less traveled road, a road which, though offering hard going for wagons, was, if the rider were careful to dodge the overhanging limbs and branches, fairly good for riding.

"I reckon old Spot will have the hogs inside an hour," Sidney said to his companion. "Jim Ashley said he saw my drove down by the bayou the other day when he was hunting."

"Any fighters among them?" she inquired eagerly.

Digitized by Google

"'Deed and there are," he answered. He threw up his hand to intercept a branch in line for the girl's face, and received a smile for thanks. "If that old boar that got away last year is with the drove you'll see a sure 'nough fight—why, Miss Sally, if you'll believe me, that old boar could rip up a dog with one stroke. I don't reckon you ever did see such tusks."

The party halted to listen. At first the baying was faint and irregular, as of dogs running, but presently as they listened there was an animated outburst.

"There they are," Sidney cried. "Must be a mile and a half or two miles from here."

"How do you know it's hogs 'stead of a 'coon?" Miss Sally inquired, as they broke into a brisk canter.

"Never you fear," he answered. "I reckon I know old Spot's bark when he finds hogs."

Sidney's boast was overheard by the couple riding behind them, for Rosland said to Adelaide:

"Old Si Mosby says when his dog bays a hog he can tell by the sound whose it is," which was greeted by a laugh from the others.

The party continued down the cut-off road for a half-mile, which brought the baying of the dogs full on the left, and then entered the timber. They had passed the fence limit, and were free to go where they could through the trackless swamp. But Sidney was good at picking a way, and kept

Digitized by Google

his horse on a rapid walk as he wound his way in and out among the trees and underbrush, followed by the party in single file.

Conversation now was difficult, and little was said beyond mirth-provoking jests called back and forth, as the riders guided their horses and dodged the overhanging branches. Sidney continually wondered how this adventure could be made to profit his suit with Miss Sally. Thus far she had maintained a reserve, in spite of her gaiety, that had defied all his ingenuity to break through, and he longed for some happening or circumstance that could be turned to his account. In his desperation he entertained all manner of ridiculous thoughts, not the least of which was that if only something would occur to test his bravery, or show his daring—if he could but save her from some grave danger.

The truth is that Sidney stood in awe of the girl. She was not the same Miss Sally that he had known from childhood up. Retaining still her vivacity, and much of her bantering spirit, she yet seemed to him deeper, more mature, and he knew not what to make of her. Nothing short of some thrilling adventure, he thought, could restore him to his old footing.

Presently the party found themselves in an extensive patch of palmetto, where the going was very slow, for the prickly-edged leaves, reaching above the horses' shoulders, and the briers that yet overtopped these, kept the riders on the watch

Digitized by Google

to avoid torn clothing and scratched hands and faces.

"If we could only scare up a bear," Sidney thought to himself still trying to imagine some adventure by which he could distinguish himself. And then he reflected that even a bear was little likely to serve his purpose, for it would be much more frightened than Miss Sally.

But not so much as a bear appeared; and after a half-hour's tedious riding through the palmetto, amid ever-increasing excitement, brought the party to the dogs, which were barking about a thick patch of undergrowth. From the interior of the clump could be heard the sullen grunting of the hogs, as they moved restlessly about under the teasing of the enemy.

"Now, you all scatter 'round on that side," Sidney said, indicating the position with a wave of his hand.

"There's no danger," Rosland said to Adelaide, in answer to her apprehensive look. "Just keep your saddle, and your horse will take care of you."

"I guess I can keep my saddle," she answered nervously, "if my horse can keep his feet."

When the party had arranged itself in the semi-circle as directed, Sidney called to the old hog-dog: "Fetch 'em out, Spot; fetch 'em out!"

The old dog, who had silently awaited the command, while his younger companions were keeping up their noisy chorus of yelpings, made

Digitized by Google

a lunge into the brush, and darted back barely in time to save himself from the tusks of a huge boar, whose snout and erect bristles appeared in the opening. At the same time Rosland and his party on the opposite side sat up a hallooing, and the dogs with them increased their noisy clamor. But the old hog-dog kept his eyes on the boar, and uttered no sound.

"Fetch 'em out, Spot!" Sidney repeated, encouragingly.

Again the dog sprang at the hog, this time coming so close that his boarship made a vicious lunge at his tormentor, but missed him a second time. This manœuver was several times repeated, amid an increasing din of shouts and barkings, till the boar was goaded into the indiscretion of giving chase to the dog, who started in the direction of home. The drove, seeing their leader go forward, and frightened by the increasing clamor from behind, now broke from the thicket and followed. Thus it happened that when the boar, convinced that he could not catch the more nimble-footed dog, turned back, he found his charge in the open, tumbling along pellmell under the fear of their pursuers.

No sooner did the old leader stop than the rest of the drove came to a stand, and huddled together in a close pack. The boar started to the rear to guard against the threatening danger, but a timely nip on the flank from the watchful and clever Spot caused him to give his attention

Digitized by Google

to the old hog-dog. Again he dashed after his retreating enemy, and again the drove was urged on in his wake.

"Why, how strange," Adelaide cried. "One would think the dog knew what he was doing that for."

"I reckon he does," Rosland answered, smiling. "That's what makes a hog-dog. And I reckon there ain't a better hog-dog on Ouachita River than Sidney's Spot."

The excellence of the animal in question became apparent when one of the younger dogs left the pack in the rear, and essayed to assist in baiting the boar. He was too slow in turning, and a savage stroke of the tusks laid bare his entrails, necessitating the shooting of the dog to end his misery. But the violent end of his inexperienced friend did not deter Spot, for no sooner did the blood-reeking snout turn than the old dog was upon him, and away under pursuit.

Thus the drove was moved on toward home until they reached the "cut-off." This seemed to be the border of their territory, and they refused to cross the open road. Again and again did Spot bait the old boar; but all to no purpose. The old guardian kept close to his fellows, and refused to be tempted into making another attack. Presently the drove began to get restive, and there was danger that it might break through the guard in the rear. Sidney, who for some time

Digitized by Google

had been riding with the others, now cautioned Miss Sally to remain with them while he rode to the front to assist in dislodging the stubborn hog. But the girl, true to the contrariness of her nature, rode after him without his being aware of it; so that when he got in front of the drove she was only a few yards to his left.

The old boar stood next to his charge, his head down, ready to strike that terrible blow that would rip open any animal that should come within reach, and his small eyes watching every movement of his foes.

"Fetch him on, Spot; fetch him on!" Sidney cried, encouragingly, to the dog. But there was no opportunity for the hog-baiter to get at the boar without being impaled on his tusks. The master went nearer and nearer for the purpose of distracting the attention of the defiant animal, as well as to encourage the dog.

Suddenly the hog made a lunge at the dog, and Turby, in wheeling to escape the on-rush of the maddened beast, caught his foot on an exposed root, stumbled and fell, throwing his master at full length on the ground. The boar no sooner saw what had happened than he left off his pursuit of the fleet-footed dog, and turned upon the prostrate and helpless man.

It was all so quickly done, and so unexpected, that for an instant the whole company was paralyzed. Rosland, who was nearest, whipped out his revolver and fired, but in his haste missed the

Digitized by Google

animal; and before he could fire a second time the boar was in range with the man.

Sidney Drake was not a man to lose his head in the presence of imminent peril; but even supposing that he was to do the right thing first, there was lacking time in which to do it. It was one of those instants of time when the conscious mind, flooded by a multitude of trifling details, leaves to the subconscious mind the action necessary for self-preservation.

When the young man raised himself upon his hands and knees it was to see the infuriated beast but a few feet from him, its small, evil eyes twinkling with the joy of victory, while a rod away Spot was flying to his master's rescue, but too late to save him. A half-turn of the head enabled him to see his friends. He saw each blanched face, each pair of eyes big with horror. He saw all but Miss Sally's—her's was not among them. And though he realized that each moment should be given to extricating himself from the danger, yet he noted the girl's absence, and turned his head in search of her.

Looking to the left he beheld the most thrilling vision that his eyes had ever rested upon; for there, within a few paces, was the beautiful girl, her mouth firmly set, and her eyes wide with apprehension, riding Whitefoot full upon the charging boar. Though his life had been forfeited in consequence he could not take his eyes from her.

Quick as a flash, and without a thought of

Digitized by Google

danger to herself, she rode straight at the hog, the slender hoofs of the horse striking the beast, toppling him over by the impact, and by a miracle escaping the cruel tusks. Before the boar could renew the attack Spot was on his back, and as he turned to free himself from the tormenting dog, Sidney got to his feet and remounted his horse.

The friends rode up to congratulate the heroine, but their lavish praise was all swept aside with a return of her merry, whimsical manner.

"You all make me feel foolish," was the most she would say, and that to Adelaide, who, as a stranger, required more consideration.

Meanwhile Spot had baited the boar across the road, and the drove straggled along after their leader. As the spirits of the party returned, and the work of driving the hogs homeward was resumed, Sidney made several attempts to have Miss Sally take seriously his protestations of gratitude, admiration, love, worship; but all to no purpose. She turned them aside in her capricious way, and threatened finally to ride with another escort if he did not desist.

Toward the end of the day the merry party of hog-drivers, with tired horses and dogs, reached Penelope plantation landing, where a rail pen had been constructed to hold the hogs until the arrival of the boat. The hogs were now too exhausted to make much trouble, but they balked sullenly when they came to the wings that led down to the pen. It required repeated attacks

Digitized by Google

of the old hog-dog to tempt the boar into following him; but Spot's persistency finally won, and down the entrance-way the savage boar chased the cunning dog, only to find at the end, his enemy leap from the enclosure and himself beaten back by the negroes. The drove crowded in close upon their leader, and soon all were penned to await shipment.

Scarcely had the party separated, and Sidney and Caleb Rosland started down the road to Daphne, to escort Miss Sally and Adelaide, than the faint sound of the Amaryllis' whistle was heard in the distance.

"There she is," Sidney cried. "She'll be here by nine o'clock.

"And my trunk not half-packed," Miss Sally cried. "We must make haste, or we won't be ready."

With that she set off at such a sharp pace that it put the others on their mettle to keep up with her, and it wholly precluded the confidential talk that Sidney had counted on having, during the ride home.

Digitized by Google

Chapter XX.

THE OLD ENGINEER DISCOURSES ON WOMEN

Sidney did not return to Penelope plantation that night, but went on to the swamps, where he had left the men cutting staves, and resumed his rough fare and hard labor. His mind was filled with conflicting thoughts of the day's doings, and of Miss Sally's non-committal manner in receiving his ardent attentions. Nothing had happened during the day to advance his suit, though he had counted so much upon it, and had planned so carefully for it. And now Miss Sally was to be on the boat with the Captain.

Yes, the hard work in the swamp was the only thing that would relieve his feelings; that or—whiskey.

Shortly after dark the dazzling beams of the Amaryllis' headlights flashed out upon the landing at Penelope, and the steamer pushed her nose into the bank as near as possible to the hog-pen. Down the stage, and out upon the landing scampered the forty roustabouts to fetch in the freight. The cabin passengers, save the few who had gone ashore with the men, were gathered on the boiler deck to witness the scene. It was pleasant to sit there in the balmy air after supper, and watch the men below work; and strangers

Digitized by Google

were interested most of all in seeing live hogs brought aboard. Even Mrs. Semperfield was eager to see the process.

There being so few hogs ordinarily at any one landing the boatmen did not feel warranted in constructing a railed gangway from the pen to the forecastle; it was thought better economy to carry them aboard. This, indeed, seemed to be the ruling thought of the Mississippi boatman; for no matter whether the freight consisted of cook-stoves, sacks of flour, bedsteads, or live hogs, it required overwhelming reasons to convince the mate that there was a better way, all things considered, than carrying it on a roustabout's shoulder.

"Well, w-e-l-l, W-E-L-L?" Grady cried in those peculiarly penetrating tones, and with a rising inflection, as he joined the men ashore.

Two men scrambled into the pen in response to the mate's words, and stood a moment to locate the vicious hogs that always were expected, and generally were found. The old boar squatted on his haunches in the farther corner, too much exhausted, apparently, for more than defensive fighting; and the younger animals lacked his spirit. All doubtless were cowed by the strangeness of the scene, the glare of the electric lights, the noises of the boat, and the encircling row of black faces peering over the top rail of the pen.

One of the men seized a young hog by the hind legs and threw it on its back, while the other

Digitized by Google

grabbed its ears; and by means of these convenient handles the squealing porker was lifted to the top rail, where two more pairs of strong hands relieved them, and transferred the burden —with feet up and tail to the fore—to the shoulder of a waiting roustabout, who in turn seized it by the flanks, and, with his partner holding the ears from behind to keep it from biting, carried it to the pen in the deck-room.

One after another the hogs were handed out of the pen and borne to the boat, each squealing lustily till placed upon the roustabout's shoulder, and then submitting to the ignominy with no other protest than a half-suppressed grunt. Though apparently a clumsy way of handling hogs, it was rapid, and in a few moments the pen had been cleared of all save the old boar. He had as yet shown no disposition to attack, but the vicious twinkle of his little eyes, and the glint of his huge tusks, as they caught the rays of the electric light, made the men pause when it came to his turn to be taken.

"Hand out that hog, will you?" the mate commanded. The words had a hard, metallic sound that penetrated the hearer like a missile; but the long, glistening tusks on the snout of the wild boar also had a penetrating quality. The men wavered between the impelling power of the mate's words, and the repelling force of the hog's tusks.

The next step in the administration of roust-

Digitized by Google

about stimulant should, according to time-honored custom, have been a flood of "vigorous English," or "mule language," which in turn, had it failed of the desired effect, would be followed by more than caressing taps and pokes of the heavy cane in the mate's hand; but all these were barred by the presence of the mild-featured old lady on the boiler deck.

"Come, come, boys," the mate said again, "we haven't tied up for the night." The tone was not loud, and to the ears of one who did not see the speaker, or understand the circumstances, the words might have been taken as pleasant sarcasm, but to the men standing in and about the pen they were charged with dynamic force. All the roustabouts who had gone aboard with hogs had returned, and the forty men faced the defiant boar, who dared them to the combat. Those of the men on the outer fringe of the crowd were grinning, the ones next to the rails were sober-faced, and the two inside looked apprehensive.

"Well, w-e-l-l, W-E-L-L?" Again came those sharp, penetrating tones with the rising inflection. The men outside pressed closer; the two inside deployed before his boarship. Some one prodded the animal through the rails with a stick, and he made a rush for the nearest roustabout, who was fortunate in escaping to the top of the fence with no other harm than a ten-inch slit in his left trouser leg, and an abrasion of the skin beneath. This first act in the little drama was

Digitized by Google

greeted by guffaws from the negroes farthest from the point of danger, and laughter from the passengers and spectators in general, but the two men most interested looked anything but pleased, as they perched upon the top rail and stared at the wild hog.

The Captain, who happened to be on the boiler deck talking with passengers, and to whom a wrestle with a wild boar had no other interest than the amount of the boat's time consumed, tapped the ready-bell. Grady threw a reproachful glance at his commanding officer for this unmistakable hint; but the glance also took in the mild-featured old lady who was watching the proceedings.

The boar had backed into the corner, where he stood with snout close to the ground, ready to rip open any flesh-and-blood body that should come within reach; the two men who had been in the pen retained their vantage point on the top rail; while the rest of the crew looked from the boar to the mate and from the mate to the boar.

The little, blue-eyed, fair-skinned Irishman was as a seething cauldron. His piercing gaze swept the faces of the cowed men. He knew they could be spurred to action by a few—a very few—"vigorous" words. But the eyes of his monitor were upon him.

Grady stood at the parting of the ways. It was as though he had been carried to a high rock to be tempted. He thought of his career as a

Digitized by Google

successful boatman, of his unsurpassed reputation as a mate; and he felt the humiliation and sting of defeat in sight of victory. The questioning glances of the men about the pen were such as given a powerful beast after it has been shorn of its teeth and claws. His professional reputation was dear to him. But over against it all was a girl's sweet face that had quickened into life and beauty under the magic of his love. It was the career or the girl.

Everything was at a stand. The steam roaring through the escape pipes told him that the engineer was waiting, the pilot stood at his wheel ready to ring the backing bell, the Captain had stopped talking and stood with his hand on the bell rope, ready to give the leaving signal. All awaited the incoming of one hog.

But the mate's hesitation quickly passed. With one supreme and mighty effort of his will he raised his arms above the cringing men, and made as though he would with his own feeble strength push them all into the pen. And whether it was because of his past reputation, the compelling force of his eye, or the hypnotic power of his presence, they moved as of one accord.

A dozen men jumped into the pen, while the rest stood with ready hands to assist. The boar made a lunge at the nearest man, who escaped by leaping the fence. In the instant of pause that followed, two strong, deft hands—hands

Digitized by Google

made strong by hard labor, and deft by cotton picking ashore and crap shooting aboard—seized the animal's hind legs; and as the enraged brute tried to turn upon its captor it was thrown upon its back, where in an instant two more strong, deft hands seized its ears and so rendered impotent the cruel tusks.

That was the end. Thus overpowered, the sturdy defender of his fellows, and leader of the drove, whose very heroism had been used by clever man and cunning dog to entrap him, surrendered, and permitted himself without further resistance to be lifted to the shoulder of the strongest roustabout, and carried aboard as ignominiously as the meanest porker of the lot.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Grady," Mrs. Semperfield said, when Ingram, with much pride, had explained the situation to her, and had summoned the mate that she might have an opportunity to express her feelings. "The Lord will always help those who ask, and the way will be opened to those who seek. It is wonderful, wonderful, wonder—ful." She looked rapturously upon the reclaimed sinner for a few moments, and then added: "To think you could accomplish all that without those awful, blasphemous words."

"I reckon," the honest fellow said, as he threw a glance at the Captain's amused face, "I reckon it's a good thing you don't know what I thought."

At Daphne landing, Adelaide and Miss Sally

Digitized by Google

came aboard in high spirits, despite the fatigue of the day's events. Miss Semperfield's vivacity Ingram could account for, but her companion's, which was like a return to her former self, he was unable to interpret and he was even more in doubt after he had heard a detailed account of the incidents of the hog-drive. He was filled with conflicting emotions when he thought of Sidney, and it required all his power of self-control to carry out the plan that had been agreed upon. He wished the struggle over. And he was sorry that his rival had not brought the matter to a conclusion, that he might know the worst—or the best.

Ingram had determined to keep faith with Sidney by making one more effort in his behalf. If that failed he should consider himself absolved from further obligation, and should feel free to enter the lists as Miss Sally's suitor.

His plan was a novel one, and it was as bold as it was novel. Having long noticed the girl's contrariety, her delight in forbidden things, and her defiance of conventionalities, it occurred to him that possibly he had made the mistake of overpraising Sidney. Might it not be, he thought, that the Athenian citizen who wished to ostracise Aristides because he was tired of hearing him called 'The Just' was typical of others?

Nor was the Captain long in doubt as to the efficacy of his plan. For, instead of belittling Sidney's exploits, as had been her wont when he

Digitized by Google

had praised them, she now championed him when he criticised.

"I thought Sidney had more sense than to get into such a mess," Ingram said, when Adelaide had given a graphic account of the incident where the young man had been thrown from his horse.

"La me, Captain!" Miss Sally exclaimed, tossing her head, "you remind me of old Si Mosby; he always knew how to put out a fire after the house had burnt down."

"What surprises me most," Ingram persisted, "is that Sidney should fall off his horse at all. Why, I've heard people say he was one of the best riders in Louisiana."

"But he didn't fall off," she retorted. "Didn't you just hear how his horse stumbled and fell? I'll just bet a pair of gloves you couldn't sit on a horse standing still—without someone holding you."

The same spirit was evoked when he essayed to belittle the young man's labor in getting out staves.

"So your dude has taken off his coat after all," he said to her tauntingly.

"And how many times have I heard you say our planters ought to be ashamed of doing nothing?"

"Think how hard his hands will be," he went on. "No more lily-white fingers to toy with my lady's tresses."

"Well, anyhow," she retorted with spirit, and

Digitized by Google

throwing him a quick glance, "I'd rather my hands were hard, than my heart."

The same effect was produced, and even in greater degree, when Ingram made slighting remarks about Sidney's character; for, true to her natural contrariness, she defended the young man whenever and wherever attacked. Nevertheless, her consummate ability to assume a mood or pretend a passion left the Captain still in doubt as to just how much was feigned and how much real.

Miss Sally and Adelaide were inseparable on the way down to New Orleans, roaming the boat at will, like children, and finding entertainment and amusement everywhere. Their presence brightened the life of the boat. Lewison put on his best manner when they visited the pilot-house, and laughed and joked like a boy. But Adelaide liked best to visit the engine-room—she had taken a great fancy to Wedgwood—and thither the two often went when he was on watch.

"You must be blacking up for a minstrel show," Miss Sally exclaimed by way of greeting, when they found the engineer at work on one of the pumps of the "doctor"—a petty job in which he had besmeared his hands with black grease, and in a moment of forgetfulness had rubbed his cheek.

"Worse than that, Miss Heath," Wedgwood responded, with a very serious look on his begrimed face. "Betsey has the sulks, and I'm trying to take 'em out of her."

Digitized by Google

"What makes you all call engines and boats and things 'she'?" the girl inquired, assuming as usual the lead in the conversation.

The old engineer looked up a moment at the two bright faces, and then said, with a twinkle in his kindly eyes: "I d'no, unless it's because we love 'em so—I suppose it's natural to liken to women the things we love most."

"La, Mr. Wedgwood, if you ain't getting as bad as Mr. Lewison." And the girls laughed, as the engineer straightened up and stood looking at them with a pleased expression on his face.

"Now, see here," he said, holding up one greasy hand argumentatively, "you young ladies mustn't construe all my remarks as compliments. To say the ladies—especially the young ones—are the sweetest, dearest, prettiest things imaginable, is not to imply they are perfect; we love them in spite of their faults."

"Oh!" exclaimed both girls in a breath.

"Take Betsey for example," Wedgwood continued, as seriously as though he were considering the weightiest of problems. "I think more of that old doctor than any I ever had before, and yet she's always making me trouble. Just watch her now"—as the big fly-wheel rolled over the center, and the steam caught the piston on the down stroke, there was a trembling, sputtering demonstration in one of the cold water pumps—"isn't that for all the world like a woman with high-heeled shoes?"

Digitized by Google

Miss Sally tossed her head—she was addicted to French heels—but Adelaide laughed at the grotesque comparison.

"Then there's another characteristic of the sex," the old engineer went on, "variety and uncertainty. No matter how many engines are made from the same patterns, no two will be alike, and you have to live with them a long time before you're sure you know them—you see," he concluded, with a droll look on his face, "it is the mystery and uncertainty in women that keep us from thinking of ourselves."

"Now you're as bad," Miss Sally pouted, "as Mr. Bushnell—I do believe you're a woman hater."

"Not I," he exclaimed heartily. "Why, women are the very flower of creation; and if some of the buds are blasted it is because of the poor care they have had."

Miss Sally began to smile again, and Adelaide grew thoughtful.

"Besides," he continued, "imperfections are not always faults—the composer sometimes drops in a discord in order that the harmony may seem the sweeter. Ever hear of the two sculptors who competed for the Olympian prize?"

"Tell us about them," Miss Sally urged.

"Well, each made a statue that his friends declared to be perfect; and all who saw them wondered how the judges could determine which was the more beautiful. But just before the un-

Digitized by Google

veiling one sculptor secretly chipped a little piece off the nose of his statue, and the judges no sooner saw the two pieces of work than they awarded him the prize—that little defect made the rest look more perfect. Now, there's that old doctor. Suppose it was perfect—just ran along day after day without ever getting out of order—why, I should forget all about it, and like as not fall asleep on watch. You can't appreciate sunshine without you have some cloudy days. Same way with women—if there wasn't a little of the Old Nick in 'em, they wouldn't be half so lovable.

"Not too much," he hastened to add, when the girls began to laugh—"they mustn't be too bad. If Betsey got too bad we'd get a new doctor; but so long as she is just a little cranky I fuss over her, and coax her along."

The engineer stopped a moment to screw down the packing cup of the cold water pump; and having hung up the wrench, he wiped his hands on a piece of waste, and led his visitors to chairs in the center of the engine-room near the throttle. Dick, the "greaser," who was learning the trade under Wedgwood, pretended to be working industriously on the electric light engine, but in reality he had eyes only for the girls.

"You see," the old engineer resumed, drawing up a chair facing the girls, "everything goes by contrast and general average. A man who is real nice and proper generally wants a wife to have a little ginger—same way with a real proper

Digitized by Google

woman—if they were both good alike they'd soon tire of each other, like you do with all sunshiny days; or else they'd dwindle down into characterless nothings like most people in the tropics. Lots of people let trifles worry them into misery, and curse the fates and wish themselves dead. Worry and fretting will make people unhappy, but real trouble won't."

The girls looked at the besmutted face of the old man in wide-eyed astonishment. He had ceased to smile, and had become very much in earnest.

"Fact," he said assuringly in his crisp, decisive way. "Real trouble makes people grow, makes them stronger, makes them better. People who think life isn't worth living haven't had enough real trouble to make it interesting."

"La me, Mr. Wedgwood," Miss Sally exclaimed, "you are getting to be as great a preacher as Captain Ingram—but I surely do love your sermons."

"Oh, it's fun to preach," laughed the engineer, a genial smile lighting up his face. "If you just preach loud enough people won't stop to see what you practice."

Digitized by Google

Chapter XXI.

THE ROUSTABOUTS' DIVERSION

The day the Amaryllis was to arrive in port Mrs. Semperfield had another view of the roustabouts' character, and one that left her very much perturbed. It had long been the custom on the cotton boats to pay the men their wages some hours before arriving in port, counting their time, however, up to the hour of arrival, and reserving one dollar from each man, which was handed to him as soon as the lines were made fast.

Though it had been but a few minutes since the long line of roustabouts had filed past the outside window of the clerk's office, where each had received his money, Ingram and his companion found a crap game in full swing when they descended to the main deck. The captain of the watch had improvised a table just aft of the boilers on the starboard guard, by mounting a hatch cover on a couple of up-turned barrels, and spreading over it an old piece of tarpaulin. About this rude apology of a gambler's board were gathered some thirty or more roustabouts, those next to the board playing, the rest looking on, and waiting their turn, as the first players lost their money and dropped out of the game.

While the Captain was selecting a vantage

Digitized by Google

point from which Mrs. Semperfield could have a good view of the scene, several passengers put in an appearance, and finally, Adelaide and Miss Sally, under the escort of the second clerk. The old lady was conscience-stricken at sight of the girls, and chided herself for setting the young folks a bad example, but the daughter and her vivacious companion assured her that they did not know she was there. And Miss Sally declared with her usual spirit and infectious laugh that there was "no harm in just looking on, anyway."

"Oh, but, my dear child," rebuked the old lady, still far from feeling at ease, "we should never countenance wrong-doing, even as idle spectators —I am very much disturbed."

"Might it not be a good thing," Ingram inquired dryly, "to peek into hell once in a while, so we won't forget what it's like?"

"But," she protested in all seriousness, "people do not always recognize, ah—the place you mentioned—when they see it."

"Well, there's no mistaking this," broke in the irreverent second clerk. "It's the real thing."

The attention of the visitors was arrested by a loud guffaw over the discomfiture of a losing player, and Ingram undertook to explain to Mrs. Semperfield and her daughter the intricacies of the game—an effort that met with very indifferent success.

What poker is to the American gambler, or

Digitized by Google

roulette to the European, or bridge to fashionable society, craps is to the roustabout. He will play "policy," when in town, and he has been known to take a hand in "seven up" while on board, but the game in which Fortuna comes into closest touch with her abject slaves is craps. The rules are so few that the simplest-minded can understand them; and the only equipment required is two dice and a level spot upon which to throw them. But the greatest merit in the eyes of its devotees is its rapid movement—the player can lose or win money faster with it than with almost any other known game of chance.

The present six-day trip of the Amaryllis had netted the men a trifle less than eighteen dollars apiece, so that the wagers on the board were necessarily small; but the playing was so steady and so rapid that the small bets quickly exhausted the funds of four-fifths of the players. Yet, though the money had been earned by the hardest kind of labor, and amid such privations in the way of creature comforts, it was risked as freely, and paid out with as little concern, as though each player was the heir to millions.

Mrs. Semperfield's practical knowledge of this subject was too limited to permit of any real interest in the game itself—she was merely conscious of the iniquity of gambling—but Adelaide eagerly watched the rapid shifting of money on the board, and laughed heartily at the "conjurings" and odd sayings of the men as they be-

Digitized by Google

sought Fortuna's favor; while as for Miss Sally she entered completely into the spirit of the occasion.

"Dah goes ma las' dollah!" exclaimed a stalwart young mulatto, showing a row of white teeth in a pleasant smile as he turned from the board. "Ah hain' got no luck, an' Ah don' rackon nobody's goin' to stake me."

He paused a moment, and cast an appealing look at the passengers. Miss Sally borrowed a dollar from the Captain, which she directed her escort to hand to the man. The darky snatched off his dilapidated hat and bowed his acknowledgments.

"De tu'key buzza'd wink at de alligatah's wife,
An' ma love 's true to me."

He attempted to round out his jargon by cutting a double-shuffle, but the yielding bales of cotton on which they stood made the execution a matter of small success. Clapping on his hat, and with a broad grin illuminating his comely features, he elbowed his way to the board, exclaiming: "Ah'm goin' to make ma fo'tune, sho'."

"How could she do it?" Mrs. Semperfield exclaimed, looking reproachfully at Miss Sally, who was laughing at the negro's antics.

"She is as innocent of evil thought as the darky himself," the Captain answered.

The newly staked man, without waiting for a

Digitized by Google

turn himself at the dice, laid his dollar on the table in a side bet with the man next to him. Winning that, he put both dollars down. His neighbor put down two dollars, and lost again. The winner left the four dollars on the board with the swaggering remark: "Ah's a dead game spo't, Ah is," and looked tauntingly at the loser. But his opponent drew back, exclaiming: "Somebody done hoodoo me." The challenge, however, was not to pass untaken. A man across the table laid down four dollars, which, at the next roll of the dice, went to swell the winnings of the lucky roustabout; and the loser tempted fortune a second time, only to see eight dollars follow the four.

The small means of the players made "plunging" rare, and there was now some curiosity to see if the winner would again double his bet. Even the old lady became interested when she saw the sixteen bright silver dollars in front of the man who had but a few minutes been given one as a stake. Near-by players reached over and touched his coat, hoping, with their mumbled incantations, to acquire some of his luck. Slowly he counted the newly won eight dollars down upon the other eight.

"Dah dey is," he exclaimed, looking up as blandly as a child. "If Ah wins dem, Ah gwine to quit."

"Yo' bettah quit now, yo' fool niggah," the captain of the watch exclaimed sarcastically.

"Ah gwine to play if Ah lose," the plunger re-

Digitized by Google

torted. "Ge'men, come down wid de money."

As a sixteen dollar side bet was rarely seen in a roustabout game of craps, the holder of the dice paused in his throwing to see if it would be taken. There were various ejaculations of surprise, disdain, and encouragement from his companions, but no one offered to take the bet until the challenge had been several times repeated, when a lynx-eyed young fellow at the corner of the table, who had been a heavy winner from carefully laid small bets, counted out sixteen dollars, exclaiming as he did so: "Ah got yo' faded, chil'."

The man with the dice, who, to win, must throw a ten, now resumed his efforts amid the keenest interest of spectators and players. He first threw an eight, then a six, then another eight, a nine, a four, while the plunger accompanied each throw with conjurings intended to bring the required "ten" before the losing "seven" should appear. The longer the delay the more absorbing the interest of the spectators, and the more fervent the adjurations to Fortuna.

The man with the dice threw a four, then a three, then a four twice.

"Mah dollah's cha'med; the lady done cha'med it," the plunger cried nervously.

Still the numbers came, a six, a four, then a five followed by another five.

"Make yo' fives come together, Pa'dnah," cried the eager better on the ten.

Digitized by Google

"Nine," "four," "six," "eight,"—"seven."

The fatal number was greeted by a loud guffaw from the assembled roustabouts, while the plunger pushed his pile of sixteen silver dollars over to his opponent, and turned from the board with the same nonchalant air that had marked his first defeat.

"That," Ingram remarked to Mrs. Semperfield, as the negro made his way out of the crowd, "is the true sporting spirit. He has lost the amount of his week's wages twice within the last hour, and yet you see how happy he is."

"Oh, it's dreadful, dreadful, dread—ful," the old lady cried, lifting her hands in despair. "How can you allow such things, Captain? Why don't you stop it at once?"

"My dear madam," Ingram answered, "the officers of this boat are not allowed to play cards or gamble when underway, either on duty or off, for the reason that it would unfit them for their work. But if the passengers wish to play, or if these roustabouts, now that they have nothing to do, wish to amuse themselves in this way, who am I that I should interfere?"

"I have heard it said," remarked a passenger, evidently a stranger, who had been watching the game and listening to the conversation, "that steamboatmen encourage this gambling among the darkies in order that they may the sooner be out of money, and so be willing to work for less wages."

Digitized by Google

"I hope," responded the Captain, shrugging his shoulders in that peculiar way in which he met foolish remarks, "St. Peter won't judge us poor steamboatmen by what our enemies say. Why, so far as that goes, this sort of thing occurs only on boats that have this peculiar run, where the men are idle during the last hours of the trip. And those who understand the life of these men know that it is merely a question of a few hours when or how they lose their money. You see they are mostly young fellows; few of them have families. And if they have any money when they leave the boat, they go straight to some 'barrel house,' or gambling hell, where they drink the worst whiskey ever concocted out of plug tobacco and fusel-oil, and are relieved of their wages without much regard to chance. Do you see those winners—some of them have considerable sums—not one of them will have a cent at the end of the first night in town."

"Then you really are doing these men a kindness." There was a sneer in the passenger's tone, but Ingram chose not to notice it.

"I'm doing nothing at all," he answered quietly, but his earnest manner emphasized his words. "I am letting them alone—as I want to be let alone. They have done the work contracted for, I have paid them for it, and now they are enjoying themselves in the way they like best. You folks"—he turned so as to include Mrs. Semperfield—"want to compel people to

Digitized by Google

be good. I don't believe it can be done—else God himself would have done it. Since he did not close the gates of hell, why should I attempt it? Indeed, how can a man be a free moral agent unless he does have the privilege of going to hell if he chooses? You may reason with these erring brothers as much as you please, and give them good advice and encouragement, but there must be no compulsion."

"La sakes," Miss Sally whispered to Adelaide, "if Captain Ingram ain't preaching again—but I just love his sermons."

"Captain," Mrs. Semperfield began, after walking with him in thoughtful silence to the boiler deck, "now that I know what Mr. Grady has passed through, and see him plucked as a brand from the burning, perhaps he won't make such a bad son-in-law."

"Not a bit of it," he returned heartily. "Mike"—he saw her shudder at the name, and said—"Grady is first of all a man, a real, downright and upright man; his heart is as gentle as a child's and as pure as a woman's; what you see of him he is; he is alike all the way through; there is no veneer on Michael."

"But I did so want a minister in the family," she murmured.

Digitized by Google

Chapter XXII.

How Henri Mollison Wiped Out an Old Score

Great as had been the mystery of the Captain's action in regard to the salvage case, and much as had been the speculation among the officers of the Amaryllis on this last trip relative to his future, as well as their own, it was as nothing when compared to that of his most intimate friends in New Orleans. Those on board were somewhat restrained by his presence; besides, so long as things moved on in the accustomed way, their easy-going dispositions did not prompt them to borrow trouble. It had been a sore disappointment to them to see their beloved "Skipper" waive his claim to the salvage money—the more especially because of the source from which it was to have come—for they considered it nothing less than a foolhardy act. Yet they could only wonder, and await developments.

But the two most interested friends in New Orleans had anything but patience; and during the six long days the Captain was out on the trip his father and the blind pilot did little but discuss "Davy's foolishness"—though they did not always use as mild a term to describe his action. When, therefore, the Tuesday morning's paper announced in the river news column the

Digitized by Google

time of the Amaryllis at Bayou Sara, they figured that she would be in port by ten o'clock. But to guard against the possibility of her outrunning their calculation, they were on the wharf an hour ahead of that time.

Dorothy had so far recovered her health as to accompany them; and the three, the child clinging to her father's right hand and the venerable Captain Jerry holding to his left arm, walked slowly up and down the levee at the upper steamboat landing, chatting of the various things that caught their attention, but mostly of "Davy."

"Humph," grunted the old man, suddenly clutching the pilot's arm, "if there isn't old Henri Mollison—I hoped I'd never set eyes on the scoundrel again."

"There is some consolation in being blind," the pilot observed quietly, "you can't see your enemies."

"True, John, very true; but you know they are there, and you know they can see to do you mischief."

"But I'm not afraid of Henri Mollison. If he got my business it wouldn't be much; and if I had to fall back on the pilot's fund I should still be happier than he is with all his wealth—I have friends that money won't buy."

"And me," Dorothy cried, kissing his hand.

"And a daughter worth more than all the world besides," he exclaimed fervently.

The old boatstoreman threw a quick glance at

Digitized by Google

the three in passing, but betrayed no sign of recognition. It had been many years since he and Captain Jerry had spoken—not since the quarrel over the sale of the Dauphine, an incident wherein the Captain had felt himself imposed upon, and the wrong and been nursed and nourished with advancing years.

"Pah!" he exclaimed when Mollison had passed. "I can't bear the sight of him; I wouldn't touch him with a pike-pole—not if he was drowning."

"Oh, come, now, Cap'n," the gentle-natured pilot expostulated, "you mustn't let your feelings go too far. Do you know," he added thoughtfully, "I feel kind o' sorry for the old man. Here he is near the end of his voyage with no cargo but money and a son who, from all accounts, is little comfort to him. Yes, sir, Cap'n, I really feel sorry for Henri Mollison."

"Well, I don't — damn him!" the old commander snorted. "And I hope the hottest place in hell won't be taken before he gets there."

"Oh, Uncle!" Dorothy cried in keenest distress, dropping her father's hand, and running to the old man's side. The look on the child's face as she looked up into his so appealingly in a moment allayed his passion.

"There, there, little one," he said caressingly, "you mustn't mind what I say. I'm just an old—"

"Oh, there's the Amaryllis!" the child inter-

Digitized by Google

rupted, catching sight of the boat as she swung into view below the stern of the Whistler, "And there's my dear Uncle Captain, too!" she cried in joyful tones that caused passers-by to smile.

It was now late in the boating season, and the cotton was so well hauled out, that, although the boat had a fair cargo it was mostly of staves, and so it did not make the picturesque display that comes of a load of cotton. But it really mattered little whether the top tier of cotton stopped below the boiler deck or went above the hurricane deck, there was no handsomer boat running into New Orleans than the Amaryllis.

"Steamboats are just like women," Captain Jerry said to his companion, when the beautiful boat had rounded-to and prepared to push her nose in between the City of Vicksburg and the Whistler, "if you know how to take care of them they never grow old. Just look at the Pride of the Coast down there—one of the finest boats that ever came to the wharf—pretty as a girl with a rose in her hair—a sure 'nough bride; but look at her now—humped up amidships and down at both ends—just like half the middle-aged women—kinks and breaks along her whole length; they didn't know how to take care of her; it's abuse, not use, that does it.

"Now look at the Amaryllis," he went on with growing animation. "She's three years older than the Pride of the Coast, and she's a bride yet—not a break in her lines from stem to

Digitized by Google

stern. It only goes to show what a man who knows how can do for a woman—I mean for a boat. Just look at her, isn't she—God forgive me, John," he cried, stopping short, and laying his hand on the pilot's shoulder. "I forgot your infirmity—I'm a blundering old ass."

"Never mind, Cap'n," the blind man said reassuringly, "it's all right; it's natural. I can see her through your eyes. Besides, I can see lots of things that you can't; my hands and ears and nose and mouth are all eyes to me—even my feet tell me of lots of things that other people never think of. Why," he exclaimed, growing animated over the thought, "I can see by the spring of the stage when I step on it that it is made of good, honest timber, and put together to stay—just like everything else that Davy makes. My feet also tell me that the crown of the deck is perfect, and that the pitch of the stairs is just right. Why, Cap'n, I can see the Amaryllis before I even set foot on her."

"Can you, John?" the old man cried, for the instant failing to catch his friend's meaning. And Dorothy, also deceived by his confident tone, looked up wonderingly into her father's face.

"Of course I can," the pilot continued. And then to the mystification and amazement of the old man and the child, he, from his intimate knowledge of the boat, and the bits of information gathered from the conversation of the by-

Digitized by Google

standers, gave a strangely faithful description of what they saw.

"She has staves amidships, and four tier of cotton on them."

"Yes," the old man assented.

"And eight tier across her head."

"So she has," the Captain admitted; while Dorothy slowly counted "Six, seven, eight; yes, that's right, papa."

"Grady is standing on the starboard side in his shirt-sleeves."

"Yes, that's right; there's Mike in his shirt-sleeves, all right,"

"And Davy is on the roof, with his left foot on the railing."

This guess was not so hazardous as it might seem, for the reason that that was his habitual pose when the boat was coming into a landing.

"You've hit it again, John," the old man cried, as much pleased as the child. "But tell me who's in the pilot-house—now I've got you."

The blind man hesitated for a moment, but suddenly recalling that Lewison was on watch the week before when the Amaryllis arrived at near the same hour, and knowing that the five-watch-a-day system would reverse the order each day, he answered with assurance, "Henderson."

"Right, by jimminy," the old Captain cried slapping his friend on the back. "Why, John, you old rascal, you've been fooling us; you can see some after all."

Digitized by Google

But Dorothy kept her big eyes on her father's face, as though she knew not what to make of it all.

"Those are the things you can see," the pilot went on in a strangely gentle tone, "but there are lots of things I can see that you can't. I can see, for instance, the engineer at the throttle, faithfully answering the pilot's signals. Ah, Cap'n, we pilots get credit for lots of things we don't deserve. What should we do if those faithful fellows didn't always have their engines ready for any emergency? You remember Ben Ritchy, how he held the Rodney's head to the bank till the fire drove him out of the engine-room, and he crawled through the pitman hole and swam ashore. Yes, the passengers hang on the pilot's words, and offer him praise; they never stop to think how soon they'd be in kingdom come if it wasn't for the care and watchfulness of the engineer."

"You are right, as usual, John," his companion assented thoughtfully.

"Then there's the watchman," the blind man continued, in the same gentle, reflective tone. "Whoever thinks of him, as he goes his lonely rounds at all hours of the night, crawling through narrow passages in the hold to see if the boat is leaking, and looking after everything from top to bottom? And if anyone did think of him, it would be as a policeman, and not of a man who adds to police duty the ability to do anything

Digitized by Google

that may come up, from running the engines to handling the roustabouts or steering the boat."

"By jimminy, John, that's so; I hadn't thought much about it myself. The watchman is about the handiest fellow on the boat."

"And there is the sailor, and the carpenter, and the fireman, and even the roustabouts. If you just stop to think of the harm any one of them could do if he got crazy drunk, or tried to get revenge for something, you can see how important they are. And then there is the cabin crew, and steward, the cook, the cabin-boys, the chambermaids, the porters, all doing their duty, and getting small thanks. Do you know, Cap'n"—the speaker's voice assumed an unusually gentle tone—"I think so much more of the crew's good faith since I lost my sight. Why, I can fairly see their honest hearts when I touch their hands, or hear their voices, or even when I know they are about."

"Well, I declare," the old man cried, when the pilot paused, "isn't that queer. I'm not what you might call a hard-hearted fellow—at least not real hard—and yet I haven't seen those things. I never seem to see a cabin-boy till he gets in the way, or spills soup on me, or something. When he does as he should, I don't know he's about."

"I used to be like that, too," the pilot responded, musingly, "but it's different now—I don't see their mistakes. Cap'n"—there was an

Digitized by Google

unwonted depth of feeling in his tone as he turned his sightless eyes toward the old man—"did you ever stop to think how nice it would be to live in a world where everybody was kind and honest and true?"

"Now you're talking about the next world, John, not this."

"No, I'm talking about this one—the world of the blind. Whoever heard of a blind man's being struck, or abused. Why, everybody is so kind to me that I often wonder what has become of the bad people I used to know."

"You forget old Henri Mollison." The Captain could not resist the temptation.

"Oh, come, now," the pilot protested, "don't be too hard on the old fellow. He sees the world just the reverse from what I do—think what a hell it is for him."

"Uncle Captain is waving to us, papa," Dorothy interrupted. Her interest in the Amaryllis and her captain far outweighted any attraction in the conversation of her elders.

"Yes, child, there's the rascal!" cried Captain Jerry, suddenly recalling the purpose of his errand, and adding, more than half in earnest, "My, if I don't give it to that boy when I get hold of him!"

There were so many boats at the wharf on this day that they lay against each other, with their sterns sticking out into the river at an angle of forty-five degrees, making it appear to

Digitized by Google

a stranger impossible for another steamer to get to the landing. But Ingram's quick eyes had noticed that if the Whistler was straightened up, he could squeeze in between her and the City of Vicksburg. The Amaryllis' nose was accordingly inserted in the small opening between the two boats, a hawser run out ashore, and then, with engines working ahead, and the "nigger" straining at the capstan, the boat wormed her way slowly up to the wharf.

When at last the stage was down the blind pilot, Captain Jerry holding to his left arm and Dorothy clinging to his right hand, was led aboard. David stood on the boiler deck at the head of the companionway, and greeted them warmly as they came up the steps.

"We've come to see the biggest fool on the river," the father exclaimed with all the severity he could command.

"Tut, tut," the pilot cautioned. "But, Davy, we do think you have gone a little too far this time—overdone it a bit, you know. It's all well enough not to hit a man when he's down—I like that spirit—but I don't think you should let him up till he promises to be good."

"Especially," the father broke in eagerly, "when you have a chance to knock him clean out by landing on his jaw." Then, as the two young ladies came up to coax Dorothy out of the Captain's arms, whither she had taken refuge and was impatiently awaiting an opportunity to en-

Digitized by Google

gage his attention, the old man bowed and lifted his hat to them. "Howd'y, Miss Sally—Miss Semperfield? No use to ask, after seeing your faces, if you've had a pleasant trip. My, my, I don't see how a man can be a bachelor with such pretty girls about—want to steal our little one, I see—teach her how to break hearts, too, I suppose. You're just in time to save this rascally son of mine from the worst scolding he ever had—if he wasn't so big, I'd take him across my knee as I used to."

"La, Captain," Miss Sally cried, laughing, and turning to the old man, "you better look sharp, else he'll be preaching to you, too. I tell him he ought to be in the pulpit—yes, he surely ought. Come, sweetheart," she said, addressing Dorothy, "I want to see you, honey."

David's eyes followed the receding figure of Miss Sally till his attention was caught by his father's words.

"What in time made you do it, Davy?"

"Do what, father? If you gentlemen have reference to that salvage case, I must insist that it is my own affair; and with all due respect to you both, I shall treat it as I see fit." There was a decisiveness in his tone that would have deterred any but an intimate, such as his father, from venturing farther.

"But it's not your affair alone!" the old man cried with growing warmth. "You forget I have a score against the scoundrel. It's a son's duty

Digitized by Google

to guard his father's honor—gad, Davy, I never supposed I should raise a son to disgrace my old age."

"Father, father!" the son protested. Such a display of passion alarmed David the more because his father, since his retirement, had been of singularly mild temperament. He laid his hand reverently on his father's shoulder and looked in his eyes. The two men were naturally of the same height, but years had stooped somewhat the form of the elder. For a few moments the two looked into each other's eyes, and then David said, sadly, but gently: "Surely, father, you don't imagine I would slight you, or stand by and see any one else do so. Come, now, be reasonable. It's an old grievance you have against this man—the thing happened almost before I was born. Let's drop it; one generation is enough for any quarrel."

"Gad, Davy, Mrs. Semperfield must have converted you. Didn't say anything about honoring your father and mother, did she?" He tried to assume a sarcastic tone, but it was a failure, for the culprit knew him too well, and merely smiled at the attempt.

"Forgiveness is all well enough in most cases," the old man went on after a pause, "but there are exceptions to all rules; and as for turning the other cheek—well, you can count me out." He made as though he would leave his son, but turned back. "Haven't you any regard for your

Digitized by Google

own honor? Haven't you any self-respect? Are you going to let the old scoundrel grind you under his heel, and have the people from one end of the river to the other laughing at you? Shame on you, Davy!"

"Father," the son began, when the old man stopped for breath, "did you ever claim salvage for helping a boat in distress?"

"You know I never did, but I never happened to save one belonging to a blackguard, a scoundrel, a—a—boatstoreman."

"Well," the son continued, smiling at his father's epithets, "suppose you had happened along as I did when the Hercules was going to destruction, and suppose your father was honored the whole length of the river as a man who had never struck an opponent when he was down, or received pay for helping a boat in distress, what would you have done?"

"Done—why, I—I—done?"

"Answer my question; what would you have done?"

"Oh, pshaw, Davy; that's neither here nor there. You're trying to make a personal matter of it."

"That's it exactly, a personal matter; that's what you always made of such things. And I have tried to walk in your footsteps. When I leave this boat for the last time, I want to go ashore with a clear conscience." He paused a moment, trying to catch his father's eye, and

Digitized by Google

then continued in earnest, measured words: "Besides, right down in the bottom of your heart you are glad I didn't file a salvage claim; ain't you, now?"

David stood with his back to the companionway, while his father faced it. The old man opened his mouth to speak, but the words did not come; instead, he remained staring at something behind his son. David turned quickly to see what could have caused such a change, and was himself scarcely less astonished. For there on the stairs, his head just showing above the railing, was the decrepit figure of the very man they had been discussing. Even the blind pilot seemed to feel his presence; for, though no word had been spoken, he also turned toward the approaching stranger.

How heavily the hand of time had been laid on the old boatstoreman was evident from the slow and painful ascent of the stairs. He paused to recover his breath when he reached the top, and looked about in a half-bewildered way, as one in a strange place. Though he was but a few feet from the three men, none of them broke the silence. The father looked at him in amazement, the son inquiringly, while Leeds turned his face from one to the other wonderingly.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, if I intrude," Mr. Mollison began, in his thin, penetrating voice, when he had rested a few moments, "but I wish a word with you—with all of you."

Digitized by Google

David bowed his head slightly to indicate assent, the pilot remained silent, and the father turned his back. The old boatstoreman tried to speak, but stammered and hesitated; Captain Jerry's back was too forbidding. But Mollison was a man of resolution, and not easily turned from his purpose.

"Captain Ingram," he began, the thin voice quavering with emotion, yet clearly expressing his carefully chosen words, "I have come on what to you may seem a strange mission. I am an old man, as you see; some people think me a hard man; perhaps I am, though it is farthest from my wish. I have made mistakes in my life, —sad, blundering, cruel mistakes."

Again he paused. The broad back of his old enemy was ominous, and the impassive face of the pilot was non-committal; but the sympathetic look in David's eyes encouraged him to go on. He wet his thin, beardless lips with his tongue, and cleared his throat. David, seeing the trembling hand that held the cane, reached for a chair, but the old man waved it aside.

"I have done wrong," he continued, when he had regained control of himself, "but believe me, sir, it was not intentional—it was due to ignorance and passion, and to the instigation of one I need not name. Your act last week opened my eyes. That any man in your position could forego his advantage was a revelation to me; and if God will spare my life a little longer, I shall try to

Digitized by Google

profit by your example. Will you help me, sir? Will you add to your first generous act by making peace on your own terms?"

He looked up appealingly into David's strong face, now suffused with emotion. The spectacle of this proud man of wealth, this old man so widely known for his hard, mercenary life, thus humbling himself before an opponent whom he had set out to crush, was so strange, and so unexpected, that it took the young Captain some time fully to realize it. When David did speak it was as though he were still in doubt as to the old man's meaning, for he said with that peculiar smile that would come when he was pleased yet perplexed:

"I didn't begin the fight, Mr. Mollison."

"I know it," the old man returned quickly; "I accept all the blame. The Whistler has made her last trip in Ouachita River."

"Very well," David answered with a shrug, "that ends the matter as far as I am concerned."

"But it doesn't end the matter as far as I am concerned, Captain. I began the fight in a fit of passion, and at the behest of one we shall not name"—he paused again at this evident reference to his son Basel—"I have caused you the loss of a season's business, and run you into debt."

"That's part of the game," David laughed, deprecatingly.

"But, Captain, you have taught me that there is something more important in this world than

Digitized by Google

money." As he spoke he drew from the inside pocket of his frock coat a well-worn pocketbook, from which he took a little bunch of papers fastened together at the end with a pin. "Here are the notes, cancelled, that you gave Mr. Mercier. Since it was I who caused you to give them, I have taken the liberty of buying them, and now ask as an evidence of your forgiveness that you accept them with my best wishes."

David was nonplussed. For a moment he could only stare at the speaker; but presently recovering himself, he exclaimed:

"No, no, Mr. Mollison, I can't allow that; we're getting down to a money level again."

"Nothing was farther from my thought, Captain, I assure you. But see here. I have, as it were, lamed your horse; simple justice requires that I replace it with another. Just forget all about the money, and consider my duty of making restitution."

Still David withheld his hand from the profferred notes.

"As you will, then," the old man said. He carefully removed the pin from the end of the notes, and tore them into halves, and then into quarters. He tried to tear them again, but the paper was too strong for the feeble fingers. Taking each quarter separately he tore it into bits, and tossed them over the guard to be borne by the wind in little showers over the deck of the Whistler.

Digitized by Google

"I wish the memory of the deed could be as easily destroyed," he mumbled to himself. Then turning to David who had been gravely watching the proceeding in silence, he said, "I hope, Captain, I shall live long enough to convince you of my sincerity. As a beginning, let me apologize to you, Mr. Leeds. I confess my mistake. If it is ever excusable to drive a rival out of business, it certainly was not in this case. It was your act, Captain, that first opened by eyes; it was yours, John Leeds, that won my heart. This will be news to you, Captain," he said, in answer to David's questioning look. "It seems that you would not accept assistance of your friend, so he goes to Mr. Mercier, buys one of your notes, and, to increase your credit, burns it in his presence."

"Did you, John, you rascal?" David cried, gripping his shoulder. "You did, I know you did—I can tell by your face, you sly dog."

Had Leeds really been a dog, and caught in the act of stealing chickens, he would not have been more embarrassed than he was at this disclosure of his ingenious generosity.

Again the well-worn pocketbook was brought forth from the inside pocket of the frock coat. This time the old boatstoreman extracted a check, which he handed to the pilot with the remark:

"As a further evidence of my good faith, Mr. Leeds, I wish to make good the amount you sacrificed for your friend."

Digitized by Google

A smile lighted up the face of the blind pilot, a pleased yet pathetic smile that illumined the scarred features, and made them beautiful to look upon; but he still withheld his hand.

"It is good, Mr. Mollison," he said with deep emotion, "to see peace take the place of strife; it warms my heart; but I can't accept your money —pardon my refusing you."

"Very well, then," the old man said with decision, "I'll double the amount and give it to the Pilots' Fund." He paused a moment, looking from one to the other of the two men, as though he had a request to make but was afraid to state it; but presently drawing courage from their sympathetic faces, he said: "Gentlemen, having done what I could to atone for the errors of the past, I wish to add this: After seeing your act of self-control, Captain, and your act of friendship, Mr. Leeds, I thought it would be the greatest privilege of my life if I might be permitted to grasp your hands and tell you so."

Instantly two hands were extended, and the pleased smiles that accompanied the act warmed to its core the heart of the old man. But a pained look came over his face when he glanced at the forbidding back of the elder Ingram. He hesitated a few moments, as though summoning all his courage, and then said:

"Captain Jerry"—he used the familiar title by which the old commander was known among his intimate friends, and which he himself had used

Digitized by Google

in past years—"Captain Jerry, I don't think I am in your debt as to money, but I do owe you an apology—may I offer that?"

The old boatman wheeled about, and there were tears in his eyes as he grasped the extended hand. He tried to speak, but for the moment his voice was choked with emotion.

"Henri, ten minutes ago I wouldn't have given you a hand if you'd been drowning, but this Davy-boy has been too much for me—I surrender. It's a shame for a couple of old codgers like you and me to go about with chips on our shoulders. Come up to the house to dinner this evening, and Mary 'll help us celebrate. This is the first steamboat fight that ever ended to suit her—besides, I'll telephone her to make some of those dumplings."

And in the revulsion of feeling the two old men were soon back in the early days when a Mississippi steamboat was one of the greatest achievements of man, and Jerry Ingram was cub pilot and Henri Mollison "mud" clerk on the Grand Turk.

Digitized by Google

Chapter XXIII.

WHAT CAME OF THE COMPACT BETWEEN SIDNEY AND THE CAPTAIN

"Yes, sir, the Skipper 's too many for me," the second clerk observed to the first engineer, as they lingered with Disbrow over the dessert the next evening after leaving port. "Got old Mollison dead to right, notes wiped out slick and clean—and still he won't perk up."

"Must be something on his mind," Disbrow suggested.

"On his heart, you'd better say," the engineer added.

"Pshaw!" the second clerk exclaimed. "You fellows don't imagine for a minute it's that little chit back there, do you?" He jerked his thumb toward the ladies' cabin where Miss Sally was playing with Dorothy, and now and then bursting into laughter at the droll remarks of the child. "I did think once there was something in it; but if there was, it's over."

"Think she has refused him?" Disbrow inquired.

"Not a little bit; she would jump at the chance—more likely he's turned her down—you've seen how she set her cap for him. Oh, well," he sighed,

Digitized by Google

"such is life. I used to have aspirations myself, but she was too many for me, too."

John Leeds, in honor of the return of peace in the steamboat fraternity, had departed from his long-established custom of taking his vacation in the summer only, and was now making a trip with Dorothy on the Amaryllis. The sightless man, when not with Ingram, spent most of his time in the pilot-house, which seemed to bring him nearest to his old boating days. And while Dorothy was mindful of all her friends, and visited each in turn, it was generally in company with Miss Sally, whose love for the child had become a passion.

Dorothy's spirituality was the thing needed most of all to round out the character of the vivacious young lady. Advice and counsel of friends could be treated flippantly, or brushed aside, but the example of this child had a compelling force that she could not resist. Nor was the joyous enthusiasm of Miss Sally lost upon Dorothy; they seemed to be the very complement of each other.

This strange association and the mingling of opposite natures fascinated Ingram. On the way down to the city Miss Sally had had Adelaide as a foil; now she had the child. Both were having a pronounced effect in completing the transformation that was taking place in her character. If he had loved the capricious girl before, he now worshiped the maturing woman. He was

Digitized by Google

literally amazed at the change, at her self-mastery, and at her forethought for others.

He was glad for another reason to see her so taken up with the child, for he was less likely to meet her alone, and so better able to keep faith with Sidney. And yet he had got into a perplexing frame of mind where conflicting desires were so nearly balanced that whichever one was uppermost he wished for the other.

Earlier in the season he had been embarrassed by the girl's apparent infatuation for him; then, when he found himself smitten by the little god, he was concerned about his friend. Now that he and Sidney had come to an understanding that left to each an honorable course, he had begun to doubt her affection for him. She was, however, such a perfect dissembler that there was no way in which he could satisfy his mind upon this point without declaring himself, and that was forbidden till Sidney had had his opportunity.

"Are you going to marry Uncle Captain?" Dorothy was seated between Miss Sally and Ingram on the settee in front of the texas when she asked the question. The Amaryllis had just pulled out of the upper landing at Pandora plantation, and was winding her way up the beautiful Black River. It was one of those delightful April days when nature is most lavish in her adornment; when the trees have done their utmost to hide with mantles of new leaves their winter suits of Spanish moss. The young corn and cotton were

Digitized by Google

visible above the level expanse of rich soil, and the long rows stretching from the river front back to the timber in the rear gave eloquent promise of the next season's business. Ingram and Miss Sally had been lost in the contemplation of the scene, when the silence was broken by the abrupt question of the child, and the laughter that followed.

"La, honey!" the girl cried, when she could control herself, "what makes you ask such questions? You said you were going to be his wife."

"But couldn't he have two wives?" the child persisted, her great, serious eyes challenging an answer in the negative.

"Not if I were one," the girl laughed, and shot a glance at the Captain, whose face betrayed pleased embarrassment.

"Dorothy seems determined to have you in the family on any terms," he ventured.

"Well," she returned, with the old-time toss of her head, "I'm sure it's nice to be loved by one admirer, anyhow."

"But a little embarrassing to be loved by two?"

She started to laugh, but checked herself, became confused, and finally exclaimed, "Honey, there comes your papa."

Ingram was not sorry to see the blind pilot come up the forward companionway, for he already regretted the remark that savored of infidelity to Sidney. But it was so tantalizing to see the girl sitting there beside him, looking so

Digitized by Google

sweet and winsome, with only the faith of a friend to prevent the realization of his hopes. He was very glad now that she had been so little alone with him, for he was afraid of himself.

Leeds was on his way to see Lewison in the pilot-house, and came toward them with such a confident step that a stranger would not have suspected his blindness.

"John," Ingram said, when the pilot came up, "I wish you wouldn't walk about on the roof unattended. That little foot-high railing is just the thing to stumble over if you ran into it."

"Thanks, Davy, but you needn't worry about me," the blind man answered with smiling confidence. "I'm just as safe here as at home. Safer, for the deck of a boat isn't level like the floor of a house. You might place me anywhere on the boat, and I'd know where I was."

"Oh, come, now, John," Ingram cried, incredulously, "you're pretty clever, I know, but you needn't draw it quite so strong."

"But it's a fact, Davy; try me."

"Yes, do, Captain," Miss Sally broke in. "I'd just love to see it."

"All right," Ingram assented, "let's humble the boaster. Here, Anderson," he called to the sailor, who was putting a new signal halyard in the port stack, "lend a hand."

Leeds seated himself in a chair, which the Captain and the sailor seized by the arms and turned

Digitized by Google

about several times, first to the right and then to the left. Then they carried him half-way to the stern, turning him about several times on the way, and returned to the forward end of the texas, Dorothy, in open-eyed wonderment, and Miss Sally, with ill-concealed excitement, following them. Finally, when they had done all they could to confuse the blind man's sense of direction, they set him down. He stood up, and moved his feet about carefully, as one might feel with the hand for some object on a bureau, and said in a confident tone, "I'm standing amidships, just aft the forward companionway."

"Well done, John!" Ingram cried heartily, and not a little astonished at the statement; while Dorothy and Miss Sally clapped their hands gleefully.

Again the pilot seated himself in the chair, for Ingram still thought the first a lucky guess. This time he was carried the length of the hurricane deck twice, being turned about several times as they went, lifted up on the skylight over the cabin and down, and moved about in every possible way to bring confusion. When he again stood on his feet he felt the deck longer than he had the first time, but finally said with the same assurance:

"I am on the starboard side, near the railing, and forward of the chimneys."

"John," exclaimed the amazed Ingram, "if anybody else had said you couldn't see a ray of

Digitized by Google

light, I shouldn't believe him. How, in the name of all that's wonderful, do you do it?"

"That's easy," the pilot chuckled, his face lighting with pleasure. "In the first place, you should know that when nature is thwarted in doing a thing one way, she tries another. When the body is robbed of one sense, our kind mother does what she can to repair the injury by developing to a higher power those that remain; just as when a crab loses one of its main pinchers, the little one next to it begins to grow large and strong. That is the way with my sense of touch. Probably you never noticed that the roof is worn smooth at the head of the main companionway? As soon as my foot told me there was no sand or tar on the canvas, I knew where I was."

"And how did you know the second time?"

"By the sheer of the deck."

"But the sheer was aft as well as athwartships; and if you had been at the stern the sheer would have been forward."

"Ah, Davy," the pilot answered, with a smile of commiseration for one who could see so little, having eyes, "you have lumped together a lot of things that are wholly different. In the first place I could have told you that I was forward by the exhaust in the stacks, but I also knew it by the sheer of the deck. You see the slope fore and aft is so long that it is practically a straight line, while athwartships the curve of the

Digitized by Google

crown is quite perceptible—to an educated foot."

"Well, I give up," Ingram cried in despair. "Dorothy, first thing we know he'll be steering the Amaryllis. What shall we do with him?"

"Just love him, Uncle Captain," cried the child, running to her father's side, and clinging to his hand, "that's what I do."

Miss Sally threw her arms about the little one, and all but smothered her with kisses.

The spirituality of little Dorothy and the philosophical resignation of the blind pilot did much to sustain Ingram in his resolution while Miss Sally was on the boat; so that when he had put her ashore at Daphne, and met Sidney at Penelope plantation, he was still able to extend to him a clean hand.

"I haven't jumped my job, Cap'n," Sidney began in explanation of his presence. "I just wanted to have a little visit with you."

Ingram was struck by the transformation that had taken place in the young man. True, the time had been brief, but there had been a moral regeneration, a shifting of ideals, a fixing of purpose, that had produced changes easily detected by the Captain's sharp eye. While the swinging of an ax, together with the rough fare of the choppers, had added a glow to his cheek, and a firmness to the grip of his hand, it was in the glance of the eye and the general air of self-possession that was most noticeable.

Sidney at last was in earnest. Ingram felt it

Digitized by Google

so distinctly that he needed no assurance in words. The young man had subjugated himself. But a regenerated Sidney meant a more formidable rival for the hand of Miss Sally. Yet, again, there was consolation in the thought that if he himself should win her, the disappointment would be better borne by Sidney.

"You sure did do me a good turn, Captain," said the young planter, when the Amaryllis was underway, and he and Ingram had settled themselves for a quiet chat, "when you set me to work. I'm never going to be a loafer again—why, I'm just beginning to know what living means." And the satisfied smile with which he said it bore eloquent testimony to the truth.

"It's the best investment you ever made," the Captain responded, "and in more ways than one. When you lend a hand yourself, those who work for you will do more."

"I reckon you're right there, too, Captain; and if I don't raise more cotton this year on Penelope plantation than any other place of its size on Ouachita River, my name isn't Sidney Drake."

But this and other topics touched upon by the two friends soon lost interest for them; and when they had started every conceivable subject, from physical culture and church-going to the building of negro cabins and curing of hams, only to find them quickly exhausted, they came to the great question, the question that had been in the mind of each from the beginning. Though each

Digitized by Google

had been reluctant to introduce the subject nearest his heart, both felt more at ease after it had been done.

It would have been highly amusing—but for its pathos—had a third person overheard this delicate balancing of interests as friends and lovers. Sidney related with enthusiasm the incident of the "hog-drive"—that being the only time he had seen Miss Sally since the card-playing venture—and listened as eagerly to Ingram's account of the recent trip to New Orleans. During it all the Captain was impressed with the fact that, though Sidney still retained much of his old-time deference, he now possessed an air of self-assertion that was new; his shifting vacillation had given way to a manly confidence.

The net result of this mutual exchange of experiences on the way up to Monroe and back was a renewal of their former agreement that, whereas, Miss Sally's heart had been originally one of Sidney's assets; and, whereas, the said organ had at a later day been bestowed upon Ingram; and, whereas, finally, she apparently had become so confused that she did not know to whom its keeping should be entrusted; therefore, it was solemnly agreed that Sidney, because of the priority of his claim, should be the first to attempt the recapture of the aforesaid Cupid's mark; and in the event of failure, Ingram should have a like opportunity; but whatever the outcome might be, it was agreed

Digitized by Google

further, and their hands were given in pledge, that it should not in any way, manner, or form interrupt the smooth current of friendship.

When the two friends parted at Penelope plantation on the way down, it was with the understanding that Sidney should ride across country to Daphne and demand a final answer from Miss Sally; and if the answer was "yes" he was to appear with her at the old deserted cabin at False Point, at the upper end of the plantation. If the answer were "no" he was to appear at the point alone, and Ingram would know from that sign that the field was clear. And again there was a solemn clasping of hands.

This arrangement was easily made; and to Sidney, galloping away on Turby at topmost speed, it may have been as easily carried out; but to Ingram, when the young planter had disappeared down the road on his flying steed, it was a hard ordeal.

The Captain walked apart, during the boat's stay at Penelope, communing with himself, and striving to consider the question impersonally. He was glad that he had remained faithful to his friend; he sincerely rejoiced in the regeneration of his character, the consummation so long striven for—and yet, and yet—why should he be called upon to make this sacrifice? Why should he for the sake of a friend be required to give up the only woman he had ever loved?

At times he grew rebellious, and traitorous

Digitized by Google

thoughts came surging into his mind. Was it not enough to give his friend an equal chance? Why give him a better? He would mount another horse and ride after Sidney, in order that they might together lay their hearts at the common shrine and permit her to choose.

But this was now impossible. No other horse could catch Turby, winged as he was by a lover's desire. No, he had acted his part according to his light; he must abide the result.

It was with a heavy heart that Ingram backed the Amaryllis out and headed her down stream. He avoided the blind pilot, and put Dorothy off with less than his usual gentleness. Alone he paced the hurricane deck, absorbed in thought. He knew that the winding course of the river made the distance between Penelope and Daphne so much greater by water than by land that Sidney would have ample time to make peace with Miss Sally—if peace it was to be— and ride back with her to the old cabin before the boat should arrive.

Would the boat never reach False Point? How she lagged, and how slow she was in handling—he had never before known the pilot to back up in rounding Coon Point. No, she was not lagging; she was rushing down the river at express-train speed—really, it was dangerous to make those sharp bends under full headway; he would speak to the pilot about his reckless handling when he came off watch.

Digitized by Google

And so the poor man was racked between his eagerness to learn of his friend's failure and his reluctance to know of his success.

Suddenly it occurred to him that Miss Sally might not be at home, in which event he would not know his fate for days. But, no, that would mean madness. If she were away from home, he would tie up the boat and await her return. Human endurance could not stand another moment's delay.

The low-hanging sun was closing a beautiful day, and as the lengthening shadows crept across the stream, cutting the smooth water into fantastic forms of shade, and softening all outlines and colors, Ingram was insensibly affected by its soothing charm. A blue heron that had been stalking majestically along the bank took wing as the boat approached, and sailed off down the river, to rise and fly again when overtaken. The deliberate calm of the solitary bird reminded him of his own impatience, and he tried to pull himself together.

Two saucy little black squirrels frisking over the bare limbs of a dead sycamore leaning over the bank caught his eye. And then he became aware that the birds, led by the masterful mockingbird perched high upon the swinging bough of a giant gum, had begun their vesper hymn.

The Captain, yielding himself to the enchantment, more slowly paced the deck. Did that swelling sylvan chorus, he thought, portend vic-

Digitized by Google

tory or defeat? Was it Nature's crooning over awakening life, or her lullaby to the last sleep?

The Amaryllis rounded the big bend above Daphne, and entered the reach. In the distance was False Point, and above the rank underbrush that had sprung up in the abandoned clearing Ingram could see the roof of the ruined cabin. He took his stand forward of the chimney on the starboard side, his right foot on the railing, and one steadying hand on the derrick guy.

"Shall I land at the house or the gin, Captain?" Henderson called from the pilot-house. He received no answer.

As the boat approached False Point, Ingram unconsciously leaned forward in his eagerness to pierce with his keen eyes the underbrush that hid the cabin from the upper side. His brain was filled with surging thoughts. His whole life seemed to be sweeping past, and it looked so insignificant, even the triumph over Mollison and the establishment of his independence, when compared with the issue of the next moment.

What should he do if Miss Sally were there with Sidney? Should he call through the megaphone his congratulations? Should he merely lift his cap, or should he throw her a kiss—the kiss that he had so many times been tempted to deliver in person?

Heavens, how slow the boat was! Would she never reach the Point?

Presently, as the Amaryllis came abreast of

Digitized by Google

the cabin, he saw Sidney standing beside his horse—alone.

He could scarcely believe his eyes. His head reeled. He wanted to shout, yet he groaned; he would have laughed aloud, but tears came to his eyes.

Sidney raised his hat in salutation; but the Captain bowed his head. Then the young planter shouted something, and clasped his hands, as though offering congratulations.

"Shall I land at the house or at the gin, Captain?" Henderson called a second time.

And the Captain, his heart swelling full, solemnly lifted his cap to Sidney in acknowledgment of his good wishes; and then looking ahead to the old plantation house where a young lady and an old man sat on the gallery awaiting his coming, he answered:

"Land at the house."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

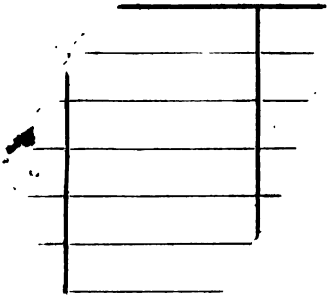
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

.l.

ARTM

o circumst.
n the Building



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google